

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THE VEDAS are the basic scriptures of the Hindus and their highest authority in all matters pertaining to religion and philosophy. They are, moreover, the earliest extant Indo-Āryan literary monuments. The Hindus regard them as eternal, without beginning, without human authorship. The primary meaning of the name Veda is Knowledge, super-sensuous wisdom. The secondary reference is to the *words* in which that Knowledge is embodied. And so the term Veda denotes not only the orthodox religious and philosophical wisdom of India, but also the books in which the earliest utterances of that wisdom are preserved. The Hindus look upon these books with the highest reverence. They are known as the Word-Brahman, the Śabda-Brahma.

Knowledge is of two kinds. The first is derived from the sense-organs and corroborated by various evidences based upon the experiences of the sense-organs. This is the form of knowledge that falls within the scope of the physical sciences. The second, however, is transcendent and is realized through the mental and spiritual discipline of yoga. This is the subject matter of the Vedas. According to Patanjali, the traditional master of the yoga doctrine, it is not the words of the Vedas that are eternal, but the Knowledge or ideas conveyed through them. This Knowledge, also called the Sphota, has existed always. At the conclusion of a cycle both the Sphota and the created universe merge in the undifferentiated causal state, and at the beginning of the new cycle the two together again become manifest. The Lord brings forth the universe with the help of the Knowledge of the Vedas. He Himself utters the words that express this Knowledge and confers upon them their appropriate meanings. That is to say, it is the Lord, the Creator of the universe, who has determined the precise meaning that is to be attached to every Vedic word. He is the first teacher of Vedic truth. Though the words may be different in different cycles, the ideas conveyed through them remain unalterable: no human intellect can interfere with them. According to Vedānta, the words of the Vedas come from the Lord spontaneously, like a man's breathing.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* commences with the statement that, in the beginning of the cycle, the Lord taught the Vedas through Brahmā, the first created being. According to the Purānas, Brahmā had been absorbed in meditation on the Supreme Lord, when, through the Lord's grace, there arose in his heart an indistinct sound. This was followed by the sound Om, the Sound-Brahman, which is the essence of the Vedic wisdom. Then this sacred syllable transformed itself into the various vowels and consonants of the alphabet. With their assistance Brahmā uttered words, and these are what became known to the world as the Vedas. He taught the Vedas to his disciples Marichi, Atri, Angirā, and others, and thus mankind came to possess the Vedic revelation.

The Vedas are called Śruti (from *śru*, to hear), since they were handed down orally from teacher to disciple. The Hindus did not at first commit them to writing. Either writing was unknown to them at that early period of history or they considered the words of the Vedas too sacred to set down. Written words become the common property of all, whereas the Vedas were to be studied only by those who had been initiated by a qualified teacher. Such was the high esteem in which the Hindus held the words that they did not make the slightest change even in the pronunciation while passing them on from generation to generation. Hence, though committed to writing only many centuries after their composition, the Vedas as we now possess them contain the exact words and ideas that were known to the most ancient Hindus.

THE DIVISIONS OF THE VEDAS

The Vedas have been divided in various ways. The two most general divisions according to subject matter are known as the Karmakānda and Jñānakānda. The first deals with karma, ritualistic action, sacrifices, etc., the purpose of which is the attainment of material prosperity here on earth and felicity in heaven after death. The second is concerned with the Knowledge through which one is liberated from ignorance and enabled to realize the Highest Good.

In the Purānas it is stated that Vyāsa was commanded by Brahmā to make a compilation of the Vedas. Vyāsa is reputed to be the author of the *Mahābhārata*, of which the *Bhagavad Gītā* forms a part.¹ He

¹ The authorship of several Hindu scriptures is ascribed to Vyāsa. Either there was more than one Vyāsa, or other Indian writers, following a well-known custom by means of which importance was often given to books in ancient times, published or circulated their own works under the name of this great philosopher.

lived at the time of the battle of Kurukshetra. With the help of four disciples, so the tradition goes, this great saint and poet arranged the Vedas in four books, namely, the Rik, Yajur, Sāman, and Atharva. He was thus the classifier of the Vedas, though not their author. For many centuries before his time the Vedas had been known and their injunctions had formed the basis of all Hindu philosophic thought and all brāhminical ceremonial. But the texts had not existed in a systematic form. They had been revealed by the Lord to certain holy men of the remote past who had purified their minds by the practice of such spiritual disciplines as self-control and concentration—the great teachers known as the rishis, or seers of truth. The Vedas name both men and women among the rishis.

Vyāsa compiled the Rig-Veda by collecting the riks. Of the sāmans he composed the Sāma-Veda, while the Yajur-Veda he composed of yajus. The Rig-Veda, which may be called a book of chants, is set to certain fixed melodies. The Sāma-Veda has no independent value; for it consists mostly of stanzas from the Rig-Veda. The arrangement of its verses is solely with reference to their place and use in the Soma-sacrifice. The Yajur-Veda contains, in addition to verses taken from the Rig-Veda, many original prose formulas which may be called sacrificial prayers.² The Atharva-Veda consists of a special class of Vedic texts known as chhandas. These deal with spells, incantations, and kingly duties, as well as exalted spiritual truths. Western scholars sometimes exclude this compilation from their consideration of the Vedas; but according to the Hindu view it definitely belongs among them. The name Trayi, or Triad, often used to denote the Vedas, is collectively applied to the Rig-Veda, the Sāma-Veda, and the Yajur-Veda, the Atharva-Veda being excluded from the Triad because it has no application to sacrificial actions. Nevertheless, one of the four priests officiating in all Vedic sacrifices had to be thoroughly versed in the chhandas.

Each of the four Vedas falls into two sections: Mantra and Brāhmana. The Mantra is also called the Samhitā (from *sam*, together, and *hita*, put), which means, literally, a collection of hymns, or mantras, used in the sacrifices. The offering of oblations for the propitiation of the devatās, or deities, is termed the sacrifice, or yajna. This was a highly important ceremony through which the ancient Indo-Āryans communed with the gods, or higher powers. The Mantra comprises the

² See S. N. Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 12. Cambridge, London 1932.

prayers and hymns, while the Brāhmana contains the rules and regulations for the sacrifices, deals with their accessories, and also reveals the meaning of the Mantra, which otherwise would remain obscure. Therefore both the Mantra and the Brāhmana were indispensable for the orthodox worship and propitiation of the gods.

A further development of the Brāhmana, and included therein, was the Āranyaka, the so-called "forest treatise." This was intended for those people who had retired into the forest in accordance with the ideal of the third stage of life, and were consequently unable to perform in the usual way the sacrifices obligatory for all twice-born householders.³ The sacrifices required many articles and accessories impossible to procure in the forest. Hence the Āranyaka prescribes symbolic worship and describes various meditations that were to be used as substitutes for an actual sacrifice. To give an illustration from the first chapter of the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*: instead of actually performing the Vedic Horse-sacrifice (Aśvamedha), the forest-dweller was to meditate in a special way upon the dawn as the head of the horse, the sun as the eye, the air as the life, and so on. The worship was lifted from the physical to the mental level.

THE FOUR STAGES

The full life-period of an Indo-Āryan was divided into four stages, namely, brahmacharya, gārhasthya, vānaprastha, and sannyāsa. The first stage was devoted to study. The celibate student led a life of chastity and austerity and served his teacher with humility. He learnt the Mantra and the Brāhmana sections of the Vedas. And when he left the teacher's house, after completing his studies, he was commanded not to deviate from truth and not to forget to persevere in the study of the Vedas. The second stage was devoted to household duties. The young man took a wife. Both together performed the Vedic sacrifice with the hymns of the Mantra and in accordance with the rules laid down in the Brāhmana. The third stage commenced when the hair turned grey and the face began to wrinkle. The householder consigned the responsibility of the home to his children and retired with his

³ The members of the three upper castes in Hindu society—the brāhmins, the kshatriyas, and the vaiśyas—were called "dvija," twice-born. Their first birth refers to their coming out of their mother's womb; the second, which is a spiritual birth, to their initiation by a religious teacher, who invests them with the sacred thread, thus entitling them to study the Vedas and participate in the Vedic rituals.

wife into the forest. He was then known as a vānaprastha or āranyaka, a forest-dweller. The Āranyaka portion of the Vedas prescribed for him sacrifice by meditation and symbolic worship.

The final stage, called sannyāsa, was the culmination of the strictly regulated life of an Indo-Āryan.⁴ During this period, having totally renounced the world, he became a sannyāsin, or wandering monk, free from worldly desires and attachments and absorbed in the uninterrupted contemplation of Brahman. It was no longer necessary to worship God by means of material articles or even mental symbols. One experienced directly the non-duality of God, the soul, and the universe—Spirit communing immediately with the Spirit. The sannyāsin took the vow of dedicating his life to Truth and to the service of humanity, and was honoured as a spiritual leader of society. And it was for him that the Upanishads (which are mostly the concluding portions of the Āranyakas) were intended. The Upanishads are concerned with the direct experience of Brahman, which liberates one from the bondage of the relative world.

Thus the Indo-Āryan seers arranged the Vedas to conform to the four stages of life. The brahmachāri studied the Samhitā, the householder followed the injunctions of the Brāhmana, the forest-dweller practised contemplation according to the Āranyaka, and the sannyāsin was guided by the exalted wisdom of the Upanishads. According to the Hindu view, all four portions of the four Vedas were revealed simultaneously and have existed from the very beginning of the cycle. They are not to be regarded as exhibiting a philosophical development or evolution in the processes of thought.⁵

⁴ According to a Vedic injunction, one can renounce the world whenever one feels distaste for it. Thus one can become a sannyāsin from any stage. The normal course, however, is to proceed through the series of the four stages.

⁵ Some Western scholars divide the Vedic age into four distinct periods. These are named the Chhandas period, the Mantra period, the Brāhmana period, and the Sutra period. According to this view, the mantras, or hymns, were composed during the Chhandas period and compiled during the Mantra period. During the first part of the Brāhmana period were composed the Brāhmanas, and during the second part, the Āranyakas and the Upanishads. During the Sutra period were written the well-known sutras, namely, the Kalpa, Grihya, Śrauta, and others. Then a decline began. There is some plausibility in this division into periods. Hindu scholars, however, challenge the categorical conclusion of Western scholars who claim that no Vedic literature but the Samhitā and Brāhmana existed before the Upanishads. The *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* (II. iv. 10.) states: "As from a fire kindled with wet faggots diverse kinds of smoke issue, even so, my dear, the Rig-Veda, Yajur-Veda,

It has already been stated that Vyāsa systematized the Vedas in four books. He taught the Rig-Veda to his disciple Paila, the Yajur-Veda to Vaiśampāyana, the Sāma-Veda to Jaimini, and the Atharva-Veda to Sumanta. Among the disciples of Vaiśampāyana was the celebrated Yājñavalkya, one of the great teachers of the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*. A legend states that this disciple became so vain of his knowledge that he incurred the displeasure of his guru and was expelled from the hermitage, with the command that he should leave what he knew of the Veda behind. The proud disciple spat out everything that he had learnt and went away. But some other disciples of the sage Vaiśampāyana were grieved at the sad plight of the Vedic lore and so, assuming the forms of partridges (tittira), they swallowed it, and later on taught that Vedic knowledge to their own disciples. Since then that portion of the Vedas has been known as the Black Yajur-Veda (Krishna Yajur-Veda) and also as the *Taittirīya Samhitā* (from tittira). Yājñavalkya, however, worshipped the sun god, who was so pleased with his devotion that he appeared before him in an equine form. The god committed to him the Vedic knowledge that later on became known as the White Yajur-Veda (Sukla Yajur-Veda) or the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* (from vāja, meaning energy, strength). This was the version of the Veda that Yājñavalkya taught to his disciples.

The four basic Vedas gradually branched off into many recensions, or śākhās, at the hands of various teachers, after whom they were named. Thus the *Śatapatha Brāhmana* of the White Yajur-Veda survives in the Kānva and Mādhyandina recensions, according to the two disciples of Yājñavalkya. They differ from each other greatly in content as well as in the number and arrangement of the sections and chapters, the former having seventeen and the latter fourteen sections. The concluding portion of the last book of both recensions is the

Sāma-Veda, Atharva-Veda, history, mythology, arts, Upanishads, verses, aphorisms (sūtras), elucidations, and explanations are like the breath of this Infinite Reality." In the *Chhāndogya Upanishad* (VII. 1. 2.) Nārada gives an account of various subjects studied by him prior to his coming to Sanatkumāra. They include—besides the Vedic texts—history, mythology, the lore of portents, logic, ethics, and various other sciences. Similar instances can be given from the *Taittirīya Āranyaka* and other scriptures. All this shows that the Vedic literature was extremely various even before the compilation of the Upanishads. It may be admitted, however, that during the four periods recognized by the Western scholars, the various designated portions of Vedic literature came in sequence to the fore.

Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad; but here again the two versions often differ. Śankarāchārya based his commentary on the Kānva recension.

Each of the Vedas contains its own Brāhmanas, which, as already stated, provide instructions regarding the procedures of sacrifice and also, through the Āranyakas, meditations and symbolic worship for the forest-dwellers. The *Aitareya* and *Kaushitaki Brāhmanas* belong, for example, to the Rig-Veda; the *Taittirīya* and *Maitrāyani*, to the Black Yajur-Veda; the *Śatapatha*, to the White Yajur-Veda; the *Chhāndogya* and *Tāndya*, to the Sāma-Veda; and the *Gopatha Brāhmana*, to the Atharva-Veda.

In most cases the concluding portion of the Āranyaka is the Upanishad—also called the Vedānta because in it the Vedic wisdom reaches its culmination (*anta*). It shows the seeker the way to Liberation and the Highest Good. Usually there is a full series, from the Samhitā, or Mantra, through the Brāhmana and Āranyaka to the culmination in the Upanishad. For example, the *Taittirīya Samhitā* is followed by the *Taittirīya Brāhmana*, at the end of which comes the *Taittirīya Āranyaka*; and this is concluded by the *Taittirīya Upanishad*. But in rare instances an Upanishad may come directly at the conclusion of the Samhitā, as is the case with the *Īśa Upanishad*. The *Taittirīya Upanishad* forms the last three chapters of the *Taittirīya Āranyaka*; the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, the last six chapters of the *Śatapatha Brāhmana*; the *Aitareya Upanishad*, the last five chapters of the *Aitareya Āranyaka*; and the *Kena Upanishad*, the ninth chapter of the *Talavakāra Brāhmana* of the White Yajur-Veda.

THE ANTIQUITY OF THE VEDAS

One hesitates to enter into a discussion of the time when the Vedas were collated. The compiler Vyāsa is reputed to have been alive at the time of the battle of Kurukshetra; but when was that battle fought? Some European Indologists assign the Vedas to the twelfth century B.C., others to earlier ages. Max Müller, for example, supposed the date to be about 1200 B.C., but Haug, about 2400. Neither believed, of course, in the divine origin of the hymns. Bāl Gangādhār Tilak, an eminent Indian scholar, calculated from astronomical data and suggested that the mantras of the Rig-Veda were brought together about five thousand years before the Christian era, while, according to the orthodox tradition, the texts, even before their compilation, had been

known to the rishis for unnumbered years. In short, the dates of the Vedic hymns and collections are far from clear.

One reason for the obscurity is that the ancient Hindus lacked the historical sense. They seldom kept records of the dates of their literary, religious, or even political achievements. The Vedas, furthermore, which had been handed down orally for so many centuries, were never believed by them to have had human authorship: they had either been taught to the sages by God or had become manifest of themselves to the primordial rishis, who were the seers of the mantras. Hence in India the tendency has always been to regard the Vedas as eternal, rather than as compositions of a certain historical moment. But even from the modern historical point of view it is not easy to determine the origin and trace the gradual development of the Vedic tradition. The Rig-Veda, which is generally recognized as the earliest of the four, contains lofty philosophical concepts, and sentiments of a monistic cast such as Western thinkers are inclined to assign to a later and highly developed stage of human thought. "The Reality is one," we read, for example, "but the sages call it by various names." Moreover, we find that a critical spirit has already developed. The ability of the gods—who themselves exist in time and space and are victims of causality—to create the universe is questioned. Such ideas indicate a maturity of philosophical insight and by no means the primitive infancy of thought.

Following their historical method, the European Indologists regard the Upanishads to be of later composition than the Mantras and Brāhmanas. They do not admit any of them to be earlier than the eleventh century B.C., while to many are assigned a much later date. In this respect the Hindu tradition, as we have seen, is totally different, the orthodox belief and teaching being that all parts of the Vedas were revealed at the same time, though the various collections might have been compiled in different periods.

THE UPANISHADS

Now about the number and divisions of the Upanishads. With the disappearance of many of the recensions of the Vedas, many Brāhmanas, Āranyakas, and Upanishads also disappeared.⁶ The fact that the sacred

⁶ The Rig-Veda is said to have existed in twenty-one recensions, the Yajur-Veda in a hundred, the Sāma-Veda in a thousand, and the Atharva-Veda in nine. But there are differences of opinion among the authorities on this subject.

books were not committed to writing in ancient times is partly responsible for this lamentable loss. Furthermore, among the works surviving, it is difficult to ascertain the exact number that should be regarded as authentic Upanishads. A religious system is considered valid in India only when it is supported by Śruti (the Vedas); hence the founders of religious sects have sometimes written books and called them Upanishads in order to give their views scriptural authority. The *Āllāh Upanishad*, for instance, was composed in the sixteenth century, at the time of the Mussalmān emperor Ākbar.

One hundred and eight Upanishads are enumerated in the *Muktika Upanishad*, which is a work belonging to the tradition of the Yajur-Veda. Among these, the *Aitareya Upanishad* and *Kaushitaki Upanishad* belong to the Rig-Veda; the *Chhāndogya* and *Kena*, to the Sāma-Veda; the *Taittiriya*, *Mahānārāyana*, *Katha*, *Svetāśvatara*, and *Maitrāyani*, to the Black Yajur-Veda; the *Īśa* and *Brihadāranyaka*, to the White Yajur-Veda; and the *Mundaka*, *Praśna*, and *Māndukya*, to the Atharva-Veda. It may be stated, also, that these Upanishads belong to differing recensions of their respective Vedas. Thus, for instance, the *Mundaka Upanishad* belongs to the Saunaka recension of the Atharva-Veda, while the *Praśna Upanishad* belongs to the Pippalāda recension. The *Brahma Sutras*, which is the most authoritative work on the Vedānta philosophy, has been based upon the *Aitareya*, *Taittiriya*, *Chhāndogya*, *Brihadāranyaka*, *Kaushitaki*, *Katha*, *Svetāśvatara*, *Mundaka*, *Praśna*, and possibly also the *Jābāla Upanishad*. Śankarāchārya wrote his celebrated commentaries on the *Īśa*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Praśna*, *Mundaka*, *Māndukya*, *Aitareya*, *Taittiriya*, *Chhāndogya*, *Brihadāranyaka*, and possibly also the *Svetāśvatara Upanishad*. These are regarded as the major works.

The teachings of the Upanishads, the *Brahma Sutras*, and the Bhagavad Gītā constitute Vedānta. Three main schools of Vedānta exist: the Dualist, Qualified Non-dualist, and Non-dualist, their principal teachers being, respectively, Madhvāchārya (A.D. 1199-1276), Rāmānujāchārya (A.D. 1017-1137), and Śankarāchārya (A.D. 788-820). Madhvāchārya has written commentaries on some of the major Upanishads according to Dualistic doctrines. Some of the disciples and followers of Rāmānujāchārya have done likewise to prove that Qualified Non-dualism is the underlying philosophy of Vedānta. But neither of these systems has won such wide acceptance and prestige as that of Śankarāchārya.

Śankarāchārya's interpretation of the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gītā, and *Brahma Sūtras* is the supreme Hindu contribution to the philosophical wisdom of the world. This remarkable genius appeared at a critical period of Indian history. The sun of Buddhism had already passed below the horizon. Various invading peoples, such as the Śaks, the Tartars, the Beluchis, and the Huns had entered India with their grotesque religious ideas and ceremonies and embraced Buddhism. At their hands the religion of Buddha had become greatly distorted. A Hindu revival was struggling into existence, and numerous Hindu sects, such as the old Vedic ritualists and the yogi ascetics, were asserting their contrary yet equally dogmatic views. A veritable babel was reigning in India when the youthful Śankarāchārya appeared on the scene.

According to his followers this great pillar of Hinduism was the perfect embodiment of the Vedic wisdom. Endowed with a keen intellect and with rare forensic powers, he courageously challenged all opponents. He cut through the cobweb of conflicting views with a direct and consistently rational interpretation of the authoritative texts, supported by his own profound spiritual experiences. Within the short span of a lifetime of only thirty-two years, he travelled the length and breadth of India, preaching his doctrines and reforming the sannyāsin organizations. He founded four monasteries at the cardinal points of the country. And meanwhile he produced a body of literary work that includes not only his great Vedāntic commentaries but also many hymns addressed to the Hindu deities, through worship of whom the aspirant's heart is purified and his spirit qualified for the Knowledge of Brahman. When one considers the lofty height reached by Śankarāchārya in his philosophy, and at the same time the soul-melting love permeating his hymns, one cannot but marvel at the mighty sweep of his mind, the catholicity of his heart, and the austere purity of his intellect. He was indeed a saviour of the Hindu world.

The subject matter of the Upanishads is abstruse. Unwary students easily become confused by their apparent contradictions. Therefore, from ancient times, books have been composed to explain and harmonize their mysteries. Among these the Bhagavad Gītā and the *Brahma Sūtras* are the best known. The Gītā is compared to the life-giving milk of the great milch cow, which is the Upanishads; Arjuna is the calf, and Sri Krishna the milker. Sri Krishna, in His dialogue with Arjuna, presented through the Bhagavad Gītā the essence of the

Upanishads. The *Brahma Sūtras* (also known as the *Vedānta Sūtras* and *Śāriraka Sūtras*) formulates the teachings of the Upanishads in concise aphorisms which reconcile the many apparent contradictions. Vyāsa is the reputed author of these basic works. They, together with the Upanishads, constitute what are called the three Prasthānas, the canonical books, which form the foundation of the religion and philosophy of Vedānta.

Side by side with Śruti, or the Vedas, there exists another body of scriptural treatises known as Smṛiti. These works are regarded as having come into existence through human authorship. They derive their authority from the Vedas and include such majestic books as the *Mahābhārata*, the various Purānas, and the *Manusamhitā*. In ancient India only those people who belonged to the three upper castes were permitted to read the Vedas. The teachings of Smṛiti, however, were accessible to all. And they too opened the door to Liberation.

In A.D. 1650, fifty Upanishads were translated into Persian under the patronage of Prince Dārā, the son of Śājahān, Emperor of Delhi. From the Persian they were translated into Latin, in A.D. 1801-1802. Schopenhauer read and studied this Latin translation and, in later years, declared: "In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life; it will be the solace of my death."

THE MEANING OF UPANISHAD

The word Upanishad has been derived from the root *sad*, to which are added two prefixes: *upa* and *ni*. The prefix *upa* denotes nearness, and *ni*, totality. The root *sad* means to loosen, to attain, and to annihilate. Thus the etymological meaning of the word is the Knowledge, or Vidyā, which, when received from a competent teacher, *loosens totally* the bondage of the world, or surely enables the pupil to *attain* (i.e. realize) the Self, or *completely destroys* ignorance, which is responsible for the deluding appearance of the Infinite Self as the finite embodied creature. Though the word primarily signifies knowledge, yet by implication it also refers to the book that contains that knowledge. The root *sad* with the prefix *upa* also connotes the humility with which the pupil should approach the teacher.

The profound Knowledge of Brahman has been described in the Bhagavad Gītā as the "sovereign science."⁷ It was considered a profound

secret and sometimes given the name of Upanishad.⁸ It is to be noted that the instructions regarding Brahman were often given in short formulas also known as Upanishads. "Its secret name (Upanishad) is *Satyasya Satyam*, 'the Truth of truth.'⁹ "Now, therefore, the instruction [about Brahman]: *Neti, neti*—'Not this, not this.'¹⁰ "That Brahman is called *Tadvana*, the Adorable of all; It should be worshipped by the name of *Tadvana*."¹¹ The books which contained the above-mentioned secret teachings and formulas were also called Upanishads.

QUALIFICATIONS OF STUDENTS

The later Vedānta teachers formulated the qualifications of the pupil entitled to study Vedānta. He must know, in a general way, the Vedas and their auxiliaries; must have attained purity of heart by freeing himself from sin, through an avoidance of selfish and forbidden actions as well as by the practice of daily devotions and obligatory duties, particular religious observances on special occasions, and the customary penances prescribed by religion. Further, he must discriminate between the Real and the unreal, and renounce the unreal. He must cultivate inner calmness and control of the senses, preserve the serenity of the mind and organs after they have been controlled, acquire such virtues as forbearance and concentration, and lastly, be possessed of an intense yearning for liberation from the bondages of worldly life. Such a one, and such a one alone, is qualified to receive from the teacher the profound knowledge of the Upanishads.

"This highest mystery of Vedānta, delivered in a previous cycle," we read, "should not be given to one whose passions have not been completely subdued, nor to one who is not a son or is not a pupil."¹² "A father may therefore tell that doctrine of Brahman to his eldest son or to a worthy pupil. But it should not be imparted to anybody else, even if he give the teacher the whole sea-girt earth full of treasure, for this doctrine is worth more than that. Yea, it is worth more."¹³ "One must not teach this to any but a son or a pupil."¹⁴

The custodians of the Vedic culture were the members of the

⁸ *Chh. Up.* I. i. 10; I. xiii. 4.

⁹ *Br. Up.* II. i. 20.

¹⁰ *Br. Up.* II. iii. 6.

¹¹ *Ke. Up.* IV. 6.

¹² *Śvet. Up.* VI. 22.

¹³ *Chh. Up.* III. xi. 5-6.

¹⁴ *Br. Up.* VI. iii. 12.

brāhmin caste. That is why the brāhmins were held in the highest esteem by every section of Hindu society.

TESTS BY TEACHERS

Aspirants desiring the knowledge of the Upanishads were subjected to severe ordeals by their preceptors. The *Katha Upanishad* describes the case of Nachiketā, who was tested in various ways by Yama, the god of death, to ascertain his fitness for the Knowledge of Brahman. He was offered horses, elephants, and cattle; children and grandchildren; rulership of the earth and many years of life; heavenly damsels and their music; and numerous other desirable things which do not fall to the lot of an ordinary mortal. But he spurned them all, understanding their transitory nature, and persisted in his prayer for the Knowledge of the Self. Pratardana was tested by Indra,¹⁵ Jānaśruti Pautrāyana by Raikva,¹⁶ Āruni by Pravāhana,¹⁷ Janaka by Yājñavalkya,¹⁸ and Brihadratha by Śākāyana.¹⁹

In the *Praśna Upanishad*²⁰ the teacher Pippalāda demanded of his six disciples that they should spend one year practising austerities, continence, and faith. "Afterwards you may ask me any question you like; if I know the answer I shall give it to you." The *Chhāndogya Upanishad*,²¹ in a celebrated passage, tells how the teacher Prajāpati required Indra and Virochana to practise spiritual disciplines for thirty-two years. Even after that, Virochana, the king of the demons, who had not acquired the necessary purity of heart, went away satisfied with the erroneous idea that the Self was identical with the body, while Indra, the king of the gods, had to continue in the austere life of a brahmachāri for another seventy-three years (one hundred and five in all) before he could realize the true knowledge of the Self.

RECONCILING THE TEACHINGS OF THE UPANISHADS

One finds in the Upanishads various strands of thought: Dualism, Qualified Non-dualism, and Non-dualism. Further, the Upanishads describe both the Brahman with attributes (Saguna Brahman) and the attributeless Brahman (Nirguna Brahman). They also deal with

¹⁵ *Kau. Up.* III. 1.

¹⁶ *Chh. Up.* IV. i.

¹⁷ *Br. Up.* VI. ii. 6.

¹⁸ *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 1.

¹⁹ *Mai. Up.* I. 2.

²⁰ I. 1-2.

²¹ VIII. vii. 3; VIII. xi. 3.

the disciplines of philosophical knowledge (jñāna), divine love (bhakti), action (karma), and yoga. Sometimes contradictions appear. Hence the question arises as to whether the Upanishads present a single, consistent, coordinated system of knowledge or a mere conglomeration of unrelated ideas. The orthodox Hindu view is that the Upanishads are consistent, that they describe a single truth, namely, the reality of the non-dual Brahman, and furthermore, that this same truth is rendered in the Bhagavad Gītā and the *Brahma Sūtras*. The Vedāntic philosophers support this conclusion by certain accepted means of proof.

But the Western critics maintain that the Upanishads present inconsistent views and that conflicting doctrines may be found even in the same Upanishad. Such a conclusion, according to the Hindu philosophers, is the natural result of the inability of the Western Orientalists to find the thread of harmony. They place their emphasis on particular details and lack comprehension of the general trend. The subject matter of the Upanishads is Brahman, the Absolute, which transcends time, space, and causality and cannot be comprehended by human thought or rendered in words. Human language and reasoning can describe and interpret sense-perceived phenomena; but Brahman is beyond their grasp. Any presentation of this subject in finite and relative human terms cannot but contain seeming contradictions. Nevertheless, this does not vitiate the Absolute Itself. Further, the Hindu philosophers admit different degrees of power of comprehension on the part of various pupils and they formulate their instructions accordingly. But such differences do not affect Brahman Itself, which is the final object of Upanishadic knowledge.

According to Śankarāchārya, the sole purpose of the Upanishads is to prove the reality of Brahman and the phenomenality or unreality of the universe of names and forms, and to establish the absolute oneness of the embodied soul and Brahman. This Vedic truth is not a product of the human mind and cannot be comprehended by the unaided human intellect. Only a competent teacher, through direct experience, can reveal to the qualified student the true significance of the Vedas and the fullness of their absolutely consistent truth.

THE KSHATTRIYA INFLUENCE

A striking feature of the Upanishads is the part played in them by the kshatriyas, the members of the royal military caste. This fact has

given rise to certain interesting speculations. The Mantra and Brāhmaṇa portions of the Vedas treat of sacrifices in which the brāhmins serve as priests. They deal with ritualistic works, in which a diversity of the actor, the instruments of action, and the result is recognized, while the sacrifices themselves are performed with a view to reaping results either here on earth or in the afterworld. This multiplicity of elements and ends stands in contrast to the central theme of the Upanishads, which is Brahmadevī, the unitive knowledge of Brahman and the oneness of existence, and to the Vedāntic condemnation of sacrifices as barriers to this unitive knowledge. The seeker for the Knowledge of Brahman is told in the Upanishads that he must renounce all actions calculated to bring fruits and eschew all desire for happiness either on earth or in heaven. Therefore several Western writers have contended that the Upanishads represent a protest of the kshatriyas against the influence of the brāhmins.²² They contend also that the Knowledge of Ātman, whatever its origin, was cultivated primarily by the kshatriyas and accepted by the brāhmins only later on. Hindu scholars, however, do not accept this view.

In reviewing the problem, let us first point out a few of the references to kshatriyas in the Upanishads.

One of the most important and ancient of the Upanishads now extant is the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka*, which frequently mentions an emperor of Videha whose name was Janaka. This imposing figure is described as a master of the Vedic knowledge (adhita-veda), endowed with a keen intellect (medhāvi), and familiar with the doctrines of the Upanishads. It is stated in the third chapter that on a certain occasion this great emperor "performed a sacrifice in which gifts were freely distributed. Vedic scholars from the Kuru and Panchāla countries were assembled." The emperor then expressed a desire to know which was "the most erudite of these Vedic scholars." And so he had a thousand cows confined in a pen, and on the horns of each cow were fixed ten pādas of gold.

Janaka said to the brāhmins: "Revered brāhmins, let him who is the best Vedic scholar among you drive home the cows." None of the brāhmins dared to accept the challenge except the sage Yājñavalkya, who asked one of his pupils to lead the cows home. This enraged the

²² P. Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p. 19. Clark, Edinburgh, 1908.

others. The chief priest of the court arose and said: "Are you, then, the best Vedic scholar among us?"

Yājñavalkya answered: "I bow to the best Vedic scholar. I only want the cows."

Thereupon the other brāhmins were determined to test his knowledge of Brahman. A learned debate ensued, and this was presided over by the kshatriya king.

In chapter four of the same work Yājñavalkya and the emperor Janaka again appear. This time the kshatriya is the disciple and the brāhmin the preceptor. Janaka receives from Yājñavalkya the supreme Knowledge of Brahman and demonstrates his appreciation by making a suitable gift: "I give you, sir, the empire of Videha, and myself with it, to wait upon you."

At the conclusion of the fifth chapter, this wise emperor Janaka instructs Buḍiḷa, the son of Aśvatarāśva, concerning the Gāyatri, a verse the knowledge of which consumes a man's sins and makes him "pure, cleansed, undecaying, and immortal."

Pravāhana Jaivali, another kshatriya king, appears in the eighth section of the first chapter of the *Chhāndogya Upanishad*, where he is described as teaching the secret of the Udgitha, discussed in the Sāma-Veda. He appears again in the third section of the fifth chapter of the same Upanishad, where he plays a more important role. In this case, the sage Āruni's son, Śvetaketu, is having an interview with the king, and the king asks him if he has been instructed by his father. The youth replies that he has received instruction; whereupon Jaivali confounds him by asking a number of questions regarding a man's departure from this world, his return, the Way of the Gods, the Way of the Fathers, and the rebirth of the soul. When Śvetaketu confesses that he does not know the answers, the king inquires: "Then why did you say that you had been instructed? How could anybody who did not know these things say that he had been instructed?" Śvetaketu returned to his father sorrowfully and described to him what had taken place.

Then Āruni went to the king, who said to him: "Sir, ask as a boon such things as men possess." The brāhmin said to him: "May such things as men possess remain with you! Repeat to me those words which you addressed to my boy." The king was disturbed. He said to Āruni: "Remain with me for some time." Then he added: "As to what you have just asked of me, sir, this knowledge has not gone to any brāhmin before you. That is why, in ancient times, all over the world, the

kshatriyas were the sole instructors in this knowledge." Finally the king gave instruction to his brāhmin disciple in what is known as the "knowledge of the Five Fires," which deals with the soul's rebirth following death. This had hitherto been a secret confined to the kshatriyas. He who acquired this knowledge, said the king, was not defiled by association with vile persons; he remained pure and clean and would gain the world of the blessed.

Section two of the sixth chapter of the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* also tells of the teaching of the knowledge of the Five Fires by Pravāhana Jaivali to Āruni, and in the *Kaushitaki Upanishad*, chapter one, we read that the kshatriya king Chitra, belonging to the line of Gārga, imparted the same knowledge to the same brāhmin sage.

Let us now return to the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*. In chapter two, section one, the kshatriya king of Benares, Ajātaśatru, was approached by the proud brāhmin Bālāki, who said: "I will tell you about Brahman." The king begged him to go on. Bālāki described the attributes of Brahman as reflected in such objects as the sun, the moon, lightning, ākāśa, the wind, fire, water, and a mirror.

"Is this all?" Ajātaśatru asked.

"This is all."

"By knowing this much one cannot know Brahman," said the king.

The brāhmin was humbled. "I approach you as a student," he said.

"It is contrary to usage," said the king, "that a brāhmin should approach a kshatriya with the thought that the latter might teach him about Brahman. However, I shall instruct you." Then the kshatriya Ajātaśatru taught the brāhmin Bālāki the oneness of jiva and Brahman by explaining the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep.

This story is repeated in the *Kaushitaki Upanishad*, chapter four.

In the *Chhāndogya Upanishad*, fifth chapter, section eleven, the story is told of five great brāhmin householders, all well versed in the Vedas, and another erudite brāhmin, Āruni, who came to the kshatriya king Kaikeyi Aśvapati for the knowledge of Vaiśvānara Ātman (the Universal Self). When they arrived, the king showed respect to them separately, and next morning said to his honoured guests: "In my kingdom there is no thief, no miser, no drunkard, no brāhmin without a sacrificial altar in his house, no ignorant person, and no adulterer—not to speak of adulteress. Sirs, I am about to perform a sacrifice. Please remain with me, and I shall bestow on each of you as much wealth as I should give to a priest." They answered: "A man should

state the purpose for which he has come. At the present time, you are the one who possesses the knowledge of the Vaiśvānara Ātman. Please give us instruction." "Tomorrow," said the king, "I shall give you my reply." Next morning the brāhmins approached him, like disciples, carrying fuel in their hands, and received the instruction for which they had come.

One more illustration. It is told in the seventh chapter of the *Chhāndogya Upanishad* that Nārada once came to the kshatriya Sanat-kumāra and humbly begged him for instruction. Sanat-kumāra said: "Please tell me what you know; after that I shall tell you what is beyond." The learned Nārada enumerated the subjects that he had studied. These included, among others, the Vedas, mythology, grammar, the science of numbers, the rules of sacrifice for the ancestors, the science of portents, logic, ethics, etymology, the science of pronunciation and prosody, the science of demons, the science of weapons, astronomy, the science of serpents, and the sciences of perfume-making, dancing, and singing. "But sir, for all of this," concluded Nārada, "I know only the mantras, the sacred words, and not the Self. I have been told by such men as yourself that he who knows the Self overcomes grief; I am in grief. Good sir, assist me beyond this grief." Thereupon Sanat-kumāra began to lead Nārada, step by step, to the Knowledge of Brahman. Sanat-kumāra said: "Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else—that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else—that is the finite. The Infinite is immortal; the finite, mortal."²³ "The Infinite," continued the king, "is, indeed, below, above, behind, before, to the right, and to the left. It is, indeed, all this."²⁴ Thus it was that the venerable Sanat-kumāra revealed to Nārada, when the impurities of his heart had been removed, "that which lies beyond darkness."²⁵

It is apparent from all of this (and this is not by any means an exhaustive list of the possible citations) that the kshatriyas exerted a profound influence on the teachings and teachers of the Upanishads. They were versed in rituals, in the mysteries of rebirth, in the identity of jiva and Brahman, and in the Knowledge of the Infinite, which is the culmination of the spiritual wisdom of the Indo-Āryans. This, as we have said, has led certain eminent Vedic scholars of the West to con-

²³ VII. xxiv. 1.

²⁴ VII. xxv. 1.

²⁵ VII. xxvi. 2.

clude that the Upanishads, containing the Knowledge of the Self, must be a later development by the kshatriyas in reaction against the rituals and sacrifices of the Mantra and Brāhmana portions of the Vedas: the brāhmins, occupied solely with the details and paraphernalia of sacrifice, were ignorant of the philosophy of the Self and so had to learn Self-Knowledge from the teachers of the military caste.

Such a conclusion, however, is hardly valid. It is true, indeed, that, according to Advaita Vedānta, the Knowledge of Brahman and the performance of sacrifices cannot coexist. They are incompatible. He who has realized the oneness of jiva and Brahman and the unreality of the relative world cannot participate in Vedic sacrifices, the aim of which is to enable the performer to enjoy happiness in heaven. However—and this is the great point—sacrifices and the Knowledge of Brahman are meant for *two different classes of aspirants*. A sannyāsin, who has experienced the transitory nature of enjoyment, is qualified for Self-Knowledge; but such enlightened ones do not constitute the major portion of society. It is the duty of others, who belong to the first three stages of life and who identify themselves with the body and mind and seek material happiness, to engage in sacrificial action. This is a basic principle, understood and taken for granted by every member of Hindu society. It is neither necessary nor possible for a sannyāsin to perform sacrifices. To suppose that there were among the brāhmins no sannyāsins who were endowed with Self-Knowledge would be wrong. The fact is that as there were both illumined and unillumined persons among the kshatriyas, so there were among the brāhmins those who were devoted to sacrifices and also those who cultivated the Knowledge of Brahman. The passages of the Upanishads that condemn sacrifices and other actions cannot possibly apply to the performers of sacrifices; for they are still householders. Such passages were directed to, and can apply to, sannyāsins alone.

As already stated, according to the Vedic tradition, the Lord alone is the source of Vedic knowledge. He is, indeed, the embodiment of that knowledge. At the beginning of a cycle He reveals it for the protection of creation, making it known through the pure hearts of the rishis. Rishis, according to the Vedas, are highly spiritual beings who attained perfection in previous cycles but have assumed human bodies in the new creation to become divine instruments for the propagation of the wisdom of the Vedas. Kapila, Vyāsa, and Vaśiṣṭha belong to this number. Then, as time goes on, the Vedic knowledge is dissem-

inated through a succession of competent teachers. The *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* supplies several genealogical tables of such Vedic seers.²⁶ There were a number of kshattriyas among the rishis, and the brāhmins, eager to acquire their knowledge, accepted discipleship under them, in accordance with the well-known Hindu maxim that a superior knowledge should be learnt even from a person of inferior rank.

THE VEDIC KNOWLEDGE

The knowledge that was prized most in ancient India by the rishis was known as Vidyā. As a result of this Vidyā, or Knowledge of Reality, one attains Bliss and Immortality. It is quite different from ordinary knowledge, which is the product of the intellect. Vidyā is a supersensuous and supramental experience.

According to the *Mundaka Upanishad*, one should acquire two forms of knowledge: the aparā (lower) and the Parā (Higher). The lower consists of the four Vedas (that is to say, their ritualistic portions) and their six auxiliaries. It deals with the phenomenal universe. The importance of the lower knowledge was admitted by the rishis. It is conducive to a man's material welfare; but its results are impermanent.

The Higher Knowledge is that by which the Imperishable Substance is known. This Imperishable Substance was given the name of Brahman by the Indo-Āryan seers; hence the Higher Knowledge was also called Brahmavidyā, the Knowledge of Brahman; and this is the knowledge to which was given the general name Upanishad. Brahmavidyā was regarded as the foundation of all other forms of knowledge—*sarva-vidyāpratishthā*. Highly treasured by the rishis, it was zealously guarded by them; for they regarded it as more precious than the earth filled with riches. The secret of Brahman could be transmitted only to a qualified disciple. "He who meets with a teacher to instruct him obtains the true knowledge."²⁷ "Only the knowledge that is learnt from a teacher leads to the Highest Good."²⁸ The qualifications of the aspirant have already been described. "If these truths have been told to a high-souled person who feels supreme devotion for God, and for his guru as for God, then they will shine forth—then they will shine forth indeed."²⁹

The actual experience of Brahman, which is the culmination of the

²⁶ *Br. Up.* II. vi; IV. vi; VI. v.

²⁷ *Chh. Up.* VI. xiv. 2.

²⁸ *Chh. Up.* IV. ix. 3.

²⁹ *Śvet. Up.* VI. 23.

Higher Knowledge, requires extremely austere disciplines. Only the great renouncers known as paramahamsas, belonging to the highest order of sannyāsins, can gain this complete Knowledge of Brahman. For Brahman cannot be perceived or comprehended by the senses or by the intellect that depends on them. Only yoga can give a man that subtle depth of understanding by which the supramental truths can be apprehended. The rishis were adept in yoga. That is why their hearts were open to the secrets of creation and the universe.

The methods of the modern physical sciences for the discovery of truth are based upon a different notion of how to search than that which directed the rishis in their realization of Brahman. A scientist seeks to understand the universe through reason based on the knowledge derived from the sense-organs. But the powers of the senses are limited. Therefore he utilizes the aid of various instruments. With the help of the telescope he brings a very distant object within the range of his vision; with the help of the microscope he immensely magnifies a minute object. Similarly other instruments come to the scientist's assistance. The technicians of science are busy, day and night, inventing new instruments by means of which to strengthen and intensify the powers of the senses.

But there exist minute things in the world that cannot be detected even by the most powerful electronic microscope. And the universe is so vast and widespread that its remotest objects would not come within a man's ken even if the largest telescope known to us were to be magnified a million times and directed toward them. The final secrets of the universe will for ever remain unrevealed to physical scientists; for intellect, aided by the senses, is the only means employed by them in their quest for understanding.

The rishis, on the other hand, did not entirely depend upon reason, as this word is usually understood. They developed another faculty of understanding, which is called bodhi, or deeper consciousness. The seeker of Brahmavidyā wakened the subtle power of the mind and senses by means of concentration and self-control. By withdrawing the senses from outer objects, he made the scattered mind one-pointed. This practice of concentration presently endowed it with keenness, depth, and a new intensity, and as the power of concentration increased, the seeker became aware of deeper phases of existence. Instinct, reason, and intuition, or higher consciousness—the three instruments of knowledge—all are differing states of the same mind. Hence a lower state can

be developed into a higher. The means to this end, however, are not external instruments but appropriate disciplines directed within.

The Vedic teacher prepared the soil of his disciple's mind before giving him any instruction regarding Brahman. Moreover, there were occasions when the instruction given was not oral. An ancient Sanskrit text says: "The teacher explains in silence and the disciple's doubts are resolved." When a pupil approached the preceptor for instruction, often he would be asked to meditate on the problem and seek the answer from within his own self. And so we read in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*⁸⁰ that Bhrigu came to his father Varuna and asked: "Revered sir, teach me Brahman." Varuna did not give him a direct reply; he asked the boy to practise meditation and austerities. Bhrigu followed this advice and came to the conclusion that food alone was Brahman. He was asked to meditate again. This time he realized that prāna alone was Brahman. His father exhorted him to concentrate further. At last the nature of Brahman was revealed in Bhrigu's heart and he realized that Brahman is *Ānandam*, Bliss Absolute.⁸¹

The Upanishads teach the truth—unknown to the sense-organs—regarding living beings (*jivas*), the universe (*jagat*), and God (*Īvara*). They describe the nature and attributes of Brahman, its reality and manifestations, its powers and aspects. They also describe the creation, preservation, and ultimate dissolution of the universe, and the changes and modifications of nature (*prakṛiti*). Furthermore, the Upanishads deal with the development of the individual soul (*jiva*), its evolution and its destiny, its bondage and its freedom. The relationship between matter and Spirit, between God, the universe, and living beings, also belongs to the subject matter of the Upanishads. These concerns relate to a supersensuous realm unknowable to a man's everyday state of consciousness. Yet the weal and woe and the good and evil of a man depend, in a special manner, upon his knowledge of these things. For man is rooted in a reality far deeper than is apparent to the senses. Just as only a small portion of an iceberg is visible, so only a small portion of man is available to the senses, no matter how they may be magnified. The solution of many of our most vital problems must come, therefore, from regions beyond the scope of the ordinary faculty of reason.

Is there a soul apart from the body? What happens to the soul after the death of the body? If a soul survives the destruction of the body,

⁸⁰ III. i.

⁸¹ *Tat. Up.* III. vi.

does it ever return to earth? Is a man responsible for his good and bad action? What is the goal and purpose of human life?

Our conduct and work depend upon our answers to these questions. And yet we cannot answer them intelligently with an intellect aided only by the senses.

Or again: Does God exist? Is God just and compassionate? Or is He unconcerned about man, regarding him with indifferent eyes? Is God endowed with a form or is He formless? Has He attributes or is He attributeless? Is He immanent in the universe or is He transcendent? Or is He both? Is the universe real or unreal? Does it exist outside man's mind or is it a figment of his imagination? Is the universe beginningless or has it a beginning? Has the Godhead become the universe or has He made it, like a watch, or is the universe a mere appearance superimposed upon the Godhead through an inscrutable illusion of some kind, like a mirage upon a desert? And if the universe is not unreal, is it finite or infinite?

An inquiring mind longs to find satisfactory answers to these philosophical questions; but there is no human means to satisfy such a longing. Only the Knowledge of Brahman can break the "fetters of the heart" and solve all doubts. This is the Hindu view. That is why the Lord Himself promulgated this Knowledge in the world through the rishis. The more a man's intelligence deepens, the more his heart is made pure and his mental horizon widens, the more will he understand and appreciate their teachings, as preserved in the Vedas and Upanishads.

One can hardly exaggerate the influence of the Vedas upon the individual and collective life of the Hindus. Since the days of their greatness, both the political and the religious life of India have undergone tremendous changes. Many aggressive races have entered the country from outside and been absorbed in this melting-pot; other powerful cultures have retained their individual traits, like the ingredients in a huge salad-bowl. Foreign conquerors have sought, by various means, to impose their customs and ideals upon Hindu society. Nevertheless, through all these vicissitudes, the Hindu world as a whole has retained its loyalty to the Vedas and still recognizes them as the highest authority in religious matters.

The outer forms of the Hindu religion have certainly changed. Modern Hindus do not perform sacrifices like their ancestors. The worship in the temples has been influenced by the Smritis and the Purānas.

Tantra has also left its impression upon the worship in many parts of the country. Yet underlying all of this there are certain fundamental truths, taught in the Upanishads, to which the Hindus have always adhered. It is this flexibility of the Hindu mind in adapting itself to the demands of changing circumstances, while remaining true to the immutable ideals of religion, that accounts for the marvellous vitality and the enduring character of the spiritual culture of India. Even now the Vedic rituals are observed at the time of birth, marriage, death, and other important occasions of a man's life. Every orthodox Hindu belonging to the three upper castes recites, three times a day during his prayers, the same selections from the Vedas which his forbears repeated five thousand years ago, while his daily obligatory religious devotions are the remnants of similar obligatory sacrifices of the Vedic period.

Indian philosophy is divided into two classes: orthodox and heterodox. The orthodox philosophy is, again, subdivided into six groups. These groups are called orthodox because they rest upon the Vedas, not because they accept the idea of a Creator God. The Sāṃkhya philosophy, one of the orthodox systems, does not believe in God as the Creator of the universe. Jainism and Buddhism, on the other hand, are called unorthodox because they do not accept the Vedas as their authority. Yet they, too, have incorporated in their systems many of the Vedic doctrines. Thus the Vedas have influenced every vital phase of Hindu life. The Smritis and other canonical laws, which govern the life of a Hindu, derive their validity from the Vedas. In Hindu society the laws that regulate the inheritance of property, adoption of children, and other social, legal, domestic, and religious customs, claim to derive their authority from the Vedas. Hindu society has always drawn its power and vision from the spiritual experiences of its ancient seers. Under the crust of the many superstitions of the present-day society, the penetrating eye can still discern the shining core of the Vedic wisdom.

Yet this wisdom, the Knowledge of Brahman, is not the monopoly of any country, sect, or race. It was developed in a special manner on the banks of the Ganges and the Indus by the Indo-Āryan seers; nevertheless, like Brahman Itself, Brahmanvidyā is universal. It belongs to all peoples and all times. It is the universal truth that is the common essence of all religions and faiths.

DISCUSSION OF BRAHMAN IN THE UPANISHADS

THE INDO-ĀRYAN THINKERS, as early as the times of the Rig-Veda, recognized the eternal Unity of Existence which "holds in Its embrace all that has come to be." This Unity pervades the universe and yet remains beyond it. All objects, animate and inanimate, are included in It. Gods, men, and subhuman beings are parts of It. As the unchanging Reality behind the universe, It was called Brahman by the Hindu philosophers; and as the indestructible Spirit in man, It was called Ātman. Brahman and Ātman, identical in nature, were the First Principle.

Derived from a root which means "to expand," the word Brahman denotes the Entity to whose greatness, magnitude, or expansion no one can put a limit or measure. The word Ātman is used to denote the immutable inner Consciousness, which experiences gross objects during the waking state, subtle objects during the dream state, and during dreamless sleep, when the subject-object relationship ceases to exist, an ineffable bliss. This is the unchanging and transcendental Consciousness in man, present in his every act of cognition, no matter what the level or state of the experience.

Bādarāyana Vyāsa, in the *Brahma Sūtras*, describes Brahman as that "from which proceed the origin, the sustenance, and the dissolution" of the universe. He further states that the Vedas are the source of this Knowledge of Brahman, and that in Brahman all Vedāntic texts find their agreement and harmony. It is Brahman alone that appears as the universe. We read in the Upanishads: "All is, indeed, Brahman"; "The soul is Brahman"; "Brahman is Consciousness and Bliss"; "There is no multiplicity whatsoever."

THE TWO ASPECTS OF BRAHMAN

The Upanishads describe Brahman as having two aspects: the one devoid of any qualifying characteristics (*nirviśeṣa*) and the other

endowed with qualities (saviśeṣha). The former is called also the Supreme Brahman (Para Brahman), while the latter is called the Inferior Brahman (Apara Brahman). The *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* describes the two forms as "gross and subtle, mortal and immortal, limited and unlimited, defined and undefined."¹

When Brahman is said to be devoid of qualifying characteristics what is meant is that the Supreme Brahman cannot be pointed out or described by any characteristic signs; It is not to be comprehended by means of any attributes or indicative marks. For this reason It is called the unqualified (Nirguna) and unconditioned (Nirvikalpa) Brahman; It is devoid of any limiting adjunct (nirupādhi).

The Inferior Brahman, on the other hand, can be described by certain characteristic signs and recognized by virtue of Its attributes and proper marks. "Brahman," states Śankarāchārya in his commentary on *Brahma Sūtras* I. i. 2, "is apprehended under two forms: in the first place, as qualified by limiting conditions owing to the multiformity of the evolutions of name and form; in the second place, as being the opposite of this, that is to say, as being free from all limiting conditions whatever. Compare," says he, "the following passages: 'For where there is duality, as it were, then one sees another; but when only the Self is all this, how should one see another?'"² 'Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else—that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else—that is the finite. The Infinite is immortal; the finite, mortal.'³ 'The wise one who, having produced all forms and made all names, sits calling [things by their names].'⁴ 'Who is without parts, without actions, tranquil, faultless, taintless, the highest bridge to Immortality—like a fire that has consumed its fuel.'⁵ 'Not this, not this.'⁶ 'It is neither gross nor minute, neither short nor long.'⁷ These passages, with many others, declare Brahman to possess two forms, according as It is the object either of Knowledge or of ignorance (avidyā)."

A striking passage regarding the attributeless Brahman declares: "It is neither gross nor minute, neither short nor long, neither redness nor

¹ *Br. Up.* II. iii. 1.

² *Br. Up.* IV. v. 15.

³ *Chh. Up.* VII. xxiv. 1.

⁴ *Tai. Ār.* III. xii. 7.

⁵ *Śvet. Up.* VI. 19.

⁶ *Br. Up.* II. iii. 6.

⁷ *Br. Up.* III. viii. 8.

moisture, neither shadow nor darkness, neither air nor ākāśa, unattached, without savour or odour, without eyes or ears, without vocal organ or mind, non-luminous, without vital force or mouth, without measure, and without interior or exterior."⁸ The Inferior Brahman, Brahman with positive attributes, on the other hand, has been described as He "whose body is spirit, whose form is light, whose thoughts are true, whose nature is like ākāśa, from whom all works, all desires, all odours, and all tastes proceed."⁹ The Upanishads tend to designate Brahman with attributes by the masculine "He," and the attributeless Brahman by the neuter "It."

But what is the final conclusion of the Upanishads concerning the ultimate nature of Brahman? Is the ultimate Brahman devoid of attributes or is It endowed with them? Śankarāchārya affirms that the purpose of Vedānta is to establish the attributeless Brahman as Ultimate Reality. He states, in his commentary on *Brahma Sūtras* III. ii. 11, that though Brahman has been described in the Upanishads as both Nirguna and Saguna, yet the goal of the scriptures is to uphold the unconditioned and attributeless Brahman as the Supreme Truth, and not the other; for the Upanishads, everywhere, when attempting to describe the ultimate nature of Brahman, have spoken of It as free of all attributes—for example, in such passages as the following: "Which is soundless, intangible, formless, undecaying."¹⁰

Rāmānuja, the chief exponent of the Qualified Non-dualistic School of Vedānta, declares, on the other hand, that the goal of the scriptures is to demonstrate the ultimate reality of Brahman as endowed with benign qualities only and free from all blemish. Śankarāchārya, therefore, stands as the upholder of an unconditioned and attributeless Brahman, while Rāmānuja represents the belief in a Brahman abounding in blessed attributes.¹¹

Which is the true purport of Vedānta? We shall attempt to show, in the following pages, that Brahman is one and without a second and that the same Brahman has been described in two ways from two points of view. The one may be called the empirical or ordinary (vyāvahārika) point of view, and the other, the real or transcendental (pāramārthika).

⁸ *Br. Up.* III. viii. 8.

⁹ *Chh. Up.* III. xiv. 2.

¹⁰ *Ka. Up.* I. iii. 15.

¹¹ There are other schools of Vedānta. One, for example, propounded by Nimbārka, says that there are in Brahman both non-duality and duality (dvaitādvaita), and that the two aspects are equally real.

The first is upheld by those who regard the world as real and therefore describe Brahman as its omnipotent and omnipresent Creator, Sustainer, and Destroyer; such a Brahman is, to be sure, Saguna, endowed with attributes. But according to the opposite opinion, the world of names and forms is finally unreal and only Brahman exists. All that is perceived anywhere is Brahman alone, and this Brahman is unconditioned, free from all qualities or attributes. Therefore there can be, in truth, no such thing as a Creator, Sustainer, and Destroyer of the universe, endowed with omnipotence, omniscience, and other qualities. From this point of view Brahman is Nirguna. Thus the same indefinable Reality is described in two different ways according to the point of view of the perceiver.

In order to show that Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman refer essentially to the same Reality, the Upanishads sometimes use in the same verse both neuter and masculine gender in connexion with Brahman: "Which otherwise *cannot be seen or seized, which is without origin and qualities, without eyes and ears, without hands and feet; which is eternal and omnipresent, all-pervading and extremely subtle; which is imperishable and is the source of all beings.*"¹² The italicized words in the original text are in the neuter gender, and the rest are in the masculine.

What we shall see is that Brahman, in association with māyā, which is Its own inscrutable power, becomes the Creator of the universe and is then called Saguna Brahman. It is then also known as the Great Lord (Mahēśvara) and Bhagavān. "The non-dual Consciousness, which the knower of Truth describes as the Reality (Tattvam), is also Brahman and the Supreme Soul (Paramātman) and God (Bhagavān)."¹³

NIRGUNA BRAHMAN

Nirguna Brahman, as has already been stated, cannot be characterized by any indicative marks, qualities, or attributes. Therefore It is not describable by words. "From whence all speech, with the mind, turns away, unable to reach It."¹⁴ Śrī Ramakrishna has said that all the scriptures and statements of holy men have been polluted, as it were, like food that has come in contact with the human tongue; Brahman alone

¹² *Mu. Up.* I. i. 6.

¹³ *Bh. I.* ii. 11.

¹⁴ *Tai. Up.* II. iv. 1.

remains unpolluted, because no tongue has been able to touch It. Brahman "cannot be attained by speech, by the mind, or by the eye."¹⁵ That is why the attributeless Brahman is explained sometimes by silence. Śankara declares, in his commentary on *Brahma Sūtras* III. ii. 17, that Bādhva, being questioned about Brahman by Bāshkalīn, explained It to him by silence. "He said to Bāshkalīn: 'Learn Brahman, O friend,' and became silent. Then, on a second and third questioning, Bādhva replied: 'I am teaching you indeed, but you do not understand. Silence is that Self.'"

The impossibility of knowing Brahman by any human means has been most emphatically expressed in the famous formula employed by Yājñavalkya: *Neti, neti*—"Not this, not this." "He, this Self, is that which has been described as 'Not this, not this.'"¹⁶

In describing the attributeless Brahman, the Upanishads employ, usually, the technique of negation:

"Which otherwise cannot be seen or seized, which has no root or attributes, no eyes or ears, no hands or feet; . . . which is imperishable and the source of all beings."¹⁷

"Turiya (the attributeless Brahman) is not that which is conscious of the internal (subjective) world, nor that which is conscious of the external (objective) world, nor that which is conscious of both, nor that which is a mass of sentiency, nor that which is simple consciousness, nor that which is insentient. It is unperceived [by any sense-organ], not related [to anything], incomprehensible [to the mind], uninferable, unthinkable, indescribable."¹⁸

The Upanishads abound in passages like the above. They all mean that Brahman is totally indescribable by the tongue and incomprehensible to the mind. Ultimate Reality is neither sun nor moon, neither star nor planet, neither god nor angel, neither man nor animal; It is not earth, water, fire, air, or space; It is not an object of sensation; It is completely different from all that is expressed by the tongue or conceived of by the mind.

We read in the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* that the learned and proud Bālāki approached King Ajātaśatru and said: "I will tell you about Brahman." He gave twelve descriptions of Brahman as the Soul (Purusha) in the sun, the moon, lightning, space, the wind, fire, water,

¹⁵ *Ka. Up.* II. iii. 12.

¹⁶ *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 22.

¹⁷ *Mu. Up.* I. i. 6.

¹⁸ *Mā. Up.* 7.

and so on; but each time he was told that these deities occupy subordinate positions in the whole of nature. The king then instructed Bālāki about Brahman through the illustration of deep sleep, which is the negation of all attributes and is, at the same time, the source of the positive experiences of the waking and the dream states.¹⁹

A great school of Buddhist philosophers has described Ultimate Reality as the Void (Sunyam). A tangible object, a fruit for instance, is only a combination of attributes, such as colour, smell, taste, or touch. If these are eliminated, one by one, what remains is the Void of the Buddhists and the Brahman of the Vedāntists. Vedānta emphasizes the unknowability and indescribability of Ultimate Reality. Though unknown and unknowable, Brahman is yet the eternal "Knower of knowing" and also the goal of all knowledge. It is the Consciousness that functions through the senses but cannot be known by them. "How can you know the eternal Knower?" "It is different from the known; It is above the unknown."²⁰ Brahman is neither the subject nor the object; It is neither the knower nor knowledge nor what is known; It is neither the seer nor the seeing nor what is seen; It is neither gross nor subtle, neither great nor small, neither being nor non-being, neither happiness nor unhappiness, neither mind nor matter. It is beyond all notions of substance and attributes. Nothing whatsoever can be predicated of It. Yet the search for Brahman is not futile. The Upanishads reiterate that Its realization is the supreme purpose of life: "Having realized Ātman, . . . one is freed from the jaws of death."²¹ It is the Supreme Unity of all contradictions: in It alone all differences are harmonized. "That which you see as other than righteousness and unrighteousness, other than all this cause and effect, other than what has been and what is to be—tell me That."²²

Sometimes the Upanishads ascribe to Brahman irreconcilable attributes in order to deny in It all empirical predicates and to show that It is totally other than anything we know. "That non-dual Ātman, though never stirring, is swifter than the mind. The devas cannot reach It, for It moves ever in front. Though standing still, It overtakes others who are running."²³ "Though sitting still, It travels far; though lying down, It goes everywhere. Who but myself can know that luminous

¹⁹ *Br. Up.* II. i.

²⁰ *Ke. Up.* I. 4.

²¹ *Ka. Up.* I. iii. 15.

²² *Ka. Up.* I. ii. 14.

²³ *Is. Up.* 4.

Ātman who rejoices and rejoices not?"²⁴ Brahman is often described as "subtler than an atom and greater than the great." The two attributes, though opposed to each other, are valid from the relative standpoint: Brahman is the essence of a subtle as well as of a gross substance. But these attributes do not apply to the Absolute Brahman.

The opposing predicates in the above-mentioned passages are ascribed to Brahman in such a manner that they cancel each other and leave to the mind the idea of an indefinable Pure Consciousness free of all attributes. Pure Consciousness in association with material upādhis appears to possess empirical qualities such as nearness and distance, or rest and movement, like a transparent crystal that assumes different colours in the presence of flowers of differing hue.

THE UNCONDITIONED (NIRUPĀDHKA) BRAHMAN

Brahman is devoid of upādhis, or limiting adjuncts. The entire phenomenal universe is subject to the categories of space, time, and causation; but Brahman, the Supreme Reality, is beyond. In contrast with phenomenal objects, Brahman is not in space but is spaceless. Brahman is not in time but is timeless. Brahman is not subject to causality but independent of the causal chain. "That which is not destroyed when the upādhis of time, space, and causation are destroyed, is Brahman, the immortal Reality." In describing Brahman as omnipresent, all-pervading, unlimited, infinitely great and infinitely small, the Upanishads only point out that It is absolutely spaceless.

"That, O Gārgi, which is above heaven and below the earth, which is this heaven and earth as well as what is between them, and which they say was, is, and will be, is pervaded by the unmanifested ākāśa (Brahman)."²⁵

"In the beginning Brahman was all this. He was one and infinite; infinite in the east, infinite in the south, infinite in the west, infinite in the north, above and below and everywhere infinite. East and the other regions do not exist for Him—no athwart, no beneath, no above. The Supreme Self is not to be fixed; He is unlimited, unborn, not to be reasoned about, not to be conceived."²⁶

What exists in space can be measured. But Brahman is beyond space, and therefore immeasurable. Hence It can be described equally as all-

²⁴ *Ka. Up.* I. ii. 21.

²⁵ *Br. Up.* III. viii. 7.

²⁶ *Mat. Up.* VI. 17.

pervading, great, and omnipresent, or as atomic (anu), small as the point of a needle or as "the hundredth part of a hair."

"He is my Self within the heart, smaller than a corn of rice, smaller than a corn of barley, smaller than a mustard-seed, smaller than a canary-seed or the kernel of a canary-seed. He is my Self within the heart, greater than the earth, greater than the sky, greater than the heaven, greater than all these worlds."²⁷

"The wise man, having realized the Self . . . as great and all-pervading, does not grieve."²⁸

"That living soul (Brahman) is to be known as part of the hundredth part of the point of a hair, divided a hundred times; and yet It is to be known as infinite."²⁹

Brahman, which is spaceless and immeasurable, is also indivisible. For the same reason Brahman is incorporeal and partless. "Who is without parts, without actions, tranquil, faultless, taintless, the highest bridge to Immortality—like a fire that has consumed its fuel."³⁰

All that exists in space is divisible and therefore subject to plurality. But the indivisible and incorporeal Brahman is free from plurality. "What is here, the same is there; and what is there, the same is here. He goes from death to death who sees any difference here."³¹

The timelessness of Brahman is indicated by stating that It is free from the limitations of past, present, and future. Sometimes It is described as eternal, without beginning or end; sometimes as momentary, involving no time at all. "Other than what has been and what is to be."³² "That which they say was, is, and will be."³³ "At whose feet, rolling on, the year with its days passes by—upon that immortal Light of all lights, the gods meditate as longevity."³⁴

Brahman is described as instantaneous duration, through the illustration of lightning: "They say lightning is Brahman."³⁵ "It is like a flash of lightning; It is like a wink of the eye."³⁶

Brahman is independent of causation. Causality is operative only in

²⁷ *Chh. Up.* III. xiv. 3.

²⁸ *Kat. Up.* I. ii. 22.

²⁹ *Śvet. Up.* V. 9.

³⁰ *Śvet. Up.* VI. 19.

³¹ *Ka. Up.* II. i. 10.

³² *Ka. Up.* I. ii. 14.

³³ *Br. Up.* III. viii. 7.

³⁴ *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 16.

³⁵ *Br. Up.* V. vii. 1.

³⁶ *Ke. Up.* IV. 4.

the realm of becoming and cannot affect Pure Being. Brahman is not the Creator of the universe in the sense that a potter is the creator of a pot, nor the cause of the universe in the sense that milk is the cause of curds. No change is possible in Brahman; It is Itself—causeless. Therefore It is called the Imperishable (Aksharam). "It should be realized in one form only; [for] It is unknowable and eternal. The Self is taintless, beyond the [subtle] ākāśa, birthless, infinite, and constant."³⁷ In other words, Brahman is free from all the transformations of birth, death, growth, decline, increase, and decrease. "The knowing Self is not born; It does not die. It has not sprung from anything; nothing has sprung from It. Birthless, eternal, everlasting, and ancient, It is not killed when the body is killed."³⁸

BRAHMAN IS UNKNOWABLE

It has already been stated that the Supreme Brahman cannot be identified by any characteristic sign or attribute. Therefore It is declared to be indescribable in words and unknowable to the mind (avāṅmanasagocharam). How is an object known? Either by a sense-organ or by the mind. Form is the object of the eye; sound, of the ear; touch, of the skin; smell, of the nose; and taste, of the tongue. But Brahman is without form, sound, touch, smell, or taste. "His form is not an object of vision; no one beholds Him with the eye."³⁹ The mind is termed by some Hindu psychologists the sixth organ of perception; by means of it one experiences such feelings as pleasure and pain, elation and depression. The determinative faculty of the mind is called the buddhi. When an object is grasped by the buddhi, it is already conditioned by the buddhi. But the infinite Brahman is unconditioned. Therefore It is not grasped by the buddhi. The light of Brahman endows the senses and the mind with their sentiency; they cannot enlighten Brahman.

To be known, a thing must be made an object. Brahman, as Pure Consciousness, is the eternal Subject; It cannot be made an object. One must presuppose Brahman in order to know objects; therefore one cannot know It as an object. Brahman, the substratum of all experience, cannot Itself be an object of experience. But, more properly, one cannot even say that Brahman is a subject; for a subject must have an object that it perceives. Nothing exists, however, except Brahman. All that can be said, then, of Brahman is that *It is*.

³⁷ *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 20.

³⁸ *Ka. Up.* I. ii. 18.

³⁹ *Ka. Up.* II. iii. 9.

"How can It be realized in any other way than by the affirmation of him who says: 'He is?'"⁴⁰ "He by whom Brahman is not known, knows It; he by whom It is known, knows It not. It is not known by those who know It; It is known by those who do not know It."⁴¹ As long as one is conscious of the duality of subject and object, one does not know Brahman. The realization of this transcendent Absolute is an inexpressible experience in which the distinction between subject, object, and knowledge is annihilated and they become one.

Since Brahman, as the "Knower of knowing," can never become an object for us, It is called unknowable. "You cannot see That which is the Witness of vision; you cannot hear That which is the Hearer of hearing; you cannot think of That which is the Thinker of thought; you cannot know That which is the Knower of knowledge."⁴² "He is never seen, but is the Witness; He is never heard, but is the Hearer; He is never thought of, but is the Thinker; He is never known, but is the Knower. There is no other witness but Him, no other hearer but Him, no other thinker but Him, no other knower but Him."⁴³ "That which cannot be expressed by speech, but by which speech is expressed—That alone know as Brahman, and not that which people here worship. That which cannot be apprehended by the mind, but by which, they say, the mind is apprehended—That alone know as Brahman, and not that which people here worship."⁴⁴

Brahman is unknowable for still another reason: It is *bhumā*, infinite. "The Infinite (*bhumā*) is bliss; there is no bliss in anything finite. Infinity alone is bliss. This Infinity, however, we must desire to understand."⁴⁵

What is the Infinite? This is how It is described in the Upanishads: "Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else—that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else—that is the finite. The Infinite is immortal; the finite, mortal. Sir, in what does the Infinite rest? In Its own greatness—no, not even in greatness."⁴⁶

Brahman is "one and without a second"—*ekamevādvyitiam*. The

⁴⁰ *Ka. Up.* II. iii. 12.

⁴¹ *Ke. Up.* II. 3.

⁴² *Br. Up.* III. iv. 2.

⁴³ *Br. Up.* III. vii. 23.

⁴⁴ *Ke. Up.* I. 5-6.

⁴⁵ *Chh. Up.* VII. xxiii. 1.

⁴⁶ *Chh. Up.* VII. xxiv. 1.

second part of this phrase ("and without a second"), qualifying the first ("one"), is important; for what it means is that Brahman is not one in the sense that the sun or the moon is one, or in the sense that the God of the monotheist is one. In such a case there is a perceiver of the oneness—which implies duality. When the non-duality of Brahman is completely realized, there is absolutely no consciousness of subject and object; the distinction between perceiver and perceived is annihilated and they become one.

Three kinds of difference are distinguished in the relative world: (1) A tree is different (*vijātiya-bheda*) from a stone. (2) The oak is different (*svajātiya-bheda*) from the poplar. (3) In the same tree, the blossom is different (*svagata-bheda*) from the leaf. All of these differences disappear in Brahman, which is homogeneous Consciousness without a break. That is why Brahman is unknowable.

"Because when there is duality, as it were, then one smells something, one sees something, one hears something, one speaks something, one thinks something, one knows something. [But] when to the knower of Brahman everything has become the Self, then what should one smell and by what means, what should one see and by what means, what should one hear and by what means, what should one speak and by what means, what should one know and by what means? By what means should one know That, owing to which all this is known—by what means, O Maitreyi, should one know the Knower?"⁴⁷

SACHCHIDĀNANDA (EXISTENCE-KNOWLEDGE-BLISS ABSOLUTE)

The Vedānta philosophy often describes Brahman by the term *Sachchidānanda*, a compound consisting of three words: *Sat* (Existence, Reality, or Being), *Chit* (Consciousness, or Knowledge), and *Ānandam* (Bliss). This term, however, does not appear in any of the principal Upanishads, though Brahman is often described in them by such separate terms as Reality, Consciousness, and Bliss. "He perceived that Bliss is Brahman, for from Bliss these beings are born; by Bliss, when born, they live; into Bliss they enter at their death."⁴⁸ "Brahman is Reality, Consciousness, and Infinity."⁴⁹ "Brahman is Knowledge."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Br. Up.* II. iv. 14.

⁴⁸ *Tai. Up.* III. vi. 1.

⁴⁹ *Tai. Up.* II. i. 1.

⁵⁰ *Tai. Up.* II. v. 1.

"Brahman is Knowledge and Bliss."⁵¹ The *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad* asks us to worship Brahman as Prajnā (Consciousness), as Satyam (Truth), and as Ānandam (Bliss). Nevertheless, it is only in the minor Upanishads that the compound term Sachchidānanda occurs as an epithet of Brahman.⁵²

Is this epithet meant to apply to the unconditioned Nirguna Brahman, or to Saguna Brahman, Brahman with attributes? According to some, the words Sat, Chit, and Ānandam refer to Saguna Brahman; according to others, to Nirguna Brahman. The former group contends that the words are positive characterizing terms, and therefore cannot be employed in connexion with the Supreme Brahman, which is to be described, as we have already seen, only by negation. The Supreme Brahman is neither being nor non-being, neither consciousness nor matter, neither happiness nor unhappiness. "When the light has risen, there is no day, no night, neither existence nor non-existence; Śiva (the Blessed One) alone is there."⁵³ Likewise, Consciousness is denied in the Supreme Brahman. It is one and without a second. Nothing exists besides. How, then, can Brahman be Consciousness, in the absence of an object? When there is duality, then one knows another; but when the Self alone is all, how should one know another?⁵⁴ In reply, it cannot be contended that the Supreme Brahman knows Itself, that It is both subject and object; for, as Śankarāchārya says, the non-dual Ātman cannot be, at the same time, both the knower and the object of knowledge, since It is partless; it is unreasonable to apply simultaneously the notion of knower and object of knowledge to what is incorporeal. And finally, for the same reasons, Ānandam cannot be an epithet appropriate to the Brahman without attributes. According to this school, therefore, the epithet Sachchidānanda can apply only to Saguna Brahman, the Great Lord (Maheśvara), who, by means of māyā, becomes the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the universe.

But according to the other view, Sat, Chit, and Ānandam can very well refer to the attributeless Brahman; for these words are used, it is declared, in a negative sense. Sat indicates that Brahman is not non-

⁵¹ *Br. Up.* III. ix. 28.

⁵² *Nṛsiṃhauṭtaratāpini Up.* VI, VII; *Rāmapurovatāpini Up.* V. 8; *Rāmouṭtaratāpini Up.* II; *Mai. Up.* III. 12. (The references in this note are taken from *The One Hundred and Eight Upanishads*, published by the Nirṇayasāgar Press, Bombay; third edition.)

⁵³ *Śvet. Up.* IV. 18.

⁵⁴ See *Br. Up.* IV. v. 15.

being; Chit, that Brahman is not nescient; and Ānandam, that Brahman is not a mere absence of pain. By such denial the positive nature of Brahman as the Absolute is affirmed.

Brahman does not exist as an empirical object—for instance, like a pot or a tree—but as Absolute Existence, without which material objects would not be perceived to exist. Just as a mirage cannot be seen without the desert, which is its unrelated substratum, so also the universe cannot exist without Brahman. Further, when the Vedāntic process of negation is followed, step by step, to its conclusion, there remains a residuum of existence, or being. No object, illusory or otherwise, could exist without the foundation of an immutable Existence; and that is Brahman. Therefore the term Sat, or Existence, as applied to Brahman, is to be understood as the negation of both empirical reality and its correlative, unreality.

The Chit, or Consciousness, of Brahman, unlike the consciousness of the mind, is not related to an object. That Chit is Absolute Consciousness, which illumines the activities of the senses and mind during their states of waking and dreaming, as well as their inactivity in dreamless sleep.

Likewise, Ānandam, or Absolute Bliss, must be understood as the negation of the happiness that we ordinarily know or experience from the contact of a sense-organ with its object. It may be likened to the bliss that accompanies deep sleep, when the distinction of subject and object is effaced and when, therefore, empirical consciousness itself ceases to function. The knower of Truth always experiences this Bliss devoid of the relationship of subject and object.

Sat, Chit, and Ānandam—Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss—then, are not attributes of Brahman, but Its very essence. Brahman is not endowed with them: Brahman is Existence itself, Consciousness itself, and Bliss itself. In the Absolute there is no distinction between substance and attributes. Sat, Chit, and Ānandam denote the same entity: when one of them is present, the other two are also present. Absolute Being is Absolute Consciousness and Absolute Bliss.

Let us see, therefore, what the Upanishads have to say about these separate epithets of Brahman, since, as we have mentioned, the compound term does not appear until a later period of Vedāntic thought.

BRAHMAN AS SAT (EXISTENCE)

In describing the true nature of Brahman, the Upanishads frequently use the term Satyam, which means Truth, Reality, Being,

Existence. "Brahman is Being, Consciousness, and Infinity."⁵⁵ "In the beginning, my dear, there was That only which is one only, without a second."⁵⁶ It is the True. It is the Self. And thou, O Svetaketu, art It."⁵⁷

There are, to be sure, passages in the Upanishads which state that *non-being* was in the beginning: "In the beginning all this was non-existent. It became existent; it grew. It turned into an egg."⁵⁸ "This universe, in truth, in the beginning was nothing at all. There was no heaven, no earth, no atmosphere. This being, that was solely non-being, conceived a wish: 'May I be.'⁵⁹ As early as the Rig-Veda, it is said of the primeval condition of things that at that time there was *na asat, na u sat*, neither non-being nor being. But in these texts "non-being" is used in the sense of "non-manifestation." That is to say, before the creation of names and forms, these things existed only in an unmanifested state. The word *sat* (being) in the Rig-Veda signifies *empirical* being.

Non-being, in the absolute sense, cannot *be* in the beginning. "In the beginning, my dear, there was that only which is one only, without a second; others say, in the beginning there was that only which is not one only, without a second; and from that which is not, that which is was born. But how could it be thus, my dear?' the father continued. 'How could that which is be born out of that which is not? No, my dear, only that which is was in the beginning, one only, without a second.'⁶⁰

The word beginning (*agrē*) in the text quoted above does not denote time. It indicates Brahman in Its purest essence, unassociated with the upādhis of creation, preservation, and destruction. Brahman is beyond time. Time, space, and causality belong to māyā. Not only before creation, but always, Brahman is Pure Consciousness, one and without a second.

"Its secret name is *Satyasya Satyam*, the Truth of truth."⁶¹ This remarkable statement points out that Brahman alone is Ultimate Reality

⁵⁵ *Tai. Up.* II. i. 3.

⁵⁶ *Chh. Up.* VI. ii. 1.

⁵⁷ *Chh. Up.* VI. viii. 7.

⁵⁸ *Chh. Up.* III. xix. 1.

⁵⁹ *Tai. Br.* II. ii. 9. 1.

⁶⁰ *Chh. Up.* VI. ii. 1-2.

⁶¹ *Br. Up.* II. i. 20.

and that the reality of the tangible universe is only apparent and derivative. The empirical reality of things is derived from the Absolute Reality of Brahman, as the apparent reality of a mirage is derived from the reality of the desert. The universe is transitory, perishable, and changing. Brahman, on the contrary, is eternal, undecaying, and immutable. What is the meaning of empirical reality? An empirically real object is, indeed, non-real. Like a dream, it has not existed in the past, will not exist in the future, but exists only at the time it is perceived. Or it existed yesterday but does not exist now. Or it does not exist now but may come into being tomorrow. An object perceived in the waking state may not be seen in dreams; or what is seen in dreams may not be seen in the waking state or in deep sleep. Such an object is said to be empirically real; but it is ultimately unreal and non-existent. "That which does not exist in the beginning and in the end is necessarily so (non-existent) in the middle. Objects are like the illusions we see; still they are regarded as if real."⁶²

But Brahman alone, as Being, exists always—in the past, present, and future. "In the beginning all this was Ātman only, one and without a second."⁶³ "Ātman alone is all this."⁶⁴ The word *this* in the texts quoted above denotes the tangible universe. According to the Upanishads, this transitory and empirical universe, when free from māyā—which, as will be explained later, is the cause of the manifestation of the diversity of names and forms—is Brahman alone.

Brahman is the very root of the universe. "Seek after its root, which is the True. Yes, all these creatures, my son, have their root in the True, they dwell in the True, they rest in the True."⁶⁵ Everything perceived is, in essence, Brahman alone. "All this is verily Brahman."⁶⁶

The multiplicity that people take to be real is not truly so. "There is no second thing separate from It which It can see."⁶⁷ "Through the mind alone [purified by Knowledge] is It to be realized. There is no differentiation whatsoever in Brahman. He goes from death to death who sees in It, as it were, differentiation."⁶⁸

What, then, is this duality or multiplicity, whose reality the Upan-

⁶² *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā.* II. 6.

⁶³ *At. Up.* I. i. 1.

⁶⁴ *Chh. Up.* VII. xxv. 2.

⁶⁵ *Chh. Up.* VI. viii. 4.

⁶⁶ *Chh. Up.* III. xiv. 1.

⁶⁷ *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 23.

⁶⁸ *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 19.

ishads so vehemently deny in order to demonstrate the sole Reality of Brahman? This duality is *māyā*. "If the manifold universe had real existence, one could then speak of its disappearance. This duality is only *māyā*; non-duality alone is real."⁶⁹ Duality is but an appearance, perceived as real when the Truth is hidden; but *jnāte dvaitam na vidyate*—"when the Truth is revealed, duality does not exist." All experiences in the empirical world are *māyā*. "When there is duality, as it were, then one smells something, one sees something, one hears something, one says something."⁷⁰ The phrase "as it were" (*iva*) is the very crux of the Upanishadic instruction regarding the universe and our daily life in it. Whenever the Upanishads seem to concede the reality of the world, even in the slightest degree, the phrase "as it were" is to be added; for anything "other" than Brahman is an appearance only.

In the *Chhāndogya Upanishad* there is a celebrated scene in which the sage Āruni gives instruction to his son.⁷¹ "Śvetaketu," says the father, "since you are so conceited, considering yourself so well read, and so stern, my dear, have you ever asked for that instruction by which we hear what cannot be heard, by which we perceive what cannot be perceived, by which we know what cannot be known?" "What is that instruction, sir?" asks the son. Āruni replies: "My dear, just as by one clod of clay all that is made of clay may be known, the difference (*vikāra*)⁷² being only a name, arising from speech, but the truth being that all is clay; and just as, my dear, by one nugget of gold all that is made of gold may be known, the difference being only a name arising from speech, but the truth being that all is gold . . . even so, my dear, is that instruction."

The effect, apart from the cause, is nothing but a name, a mere matter of words; it is, in essence, the same as the cause. We distinguish the effect from the cause by superimposing upon the latter a name and a form to serve a practical purpose of life in the empirical world. This name and form, apart from the substratum, is *māyā*. Practically, one may see a gold bracelet or a gold earring and the difference between them, but in truth they are only gold. It is the same with the ocean and its waves, which are identical in essence. Likewise, the non-dual Brahman alone appears as the universe and its objects. Just as, from

⁶⁹ *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā. I. 17.*

⁷⁰ *Br. Up. II. iv. 14.*

⁷¹ *VI. i. 3-5.*

⁷² I.e. the effect.

the standpoint of name and form, one distinguishes between a bracelet and an earring, so also, from the standpoint of name and form, one makes distinctions between the various objects of the world; yet all are, in reality, Brahman. For nothing whatsoever exists but Brahman. If a man believes that he sees something other than Brahman, he is being deceived by an illusion. What an ignorant person, a victim of *māyā*, regards as the universe, endowed with names and forms and characterized by the interplay of the pairs of opposites, is realized by the illumined soul to be the non-dual Brahman, just as the water of a mirage, which is seen by a deluded man, is realized by a knowing person to be dry sand. But *samsāra*, or the relative world, as such, the Upanishad warns, is not Brahman, or Ultimate Reality. Time, space, and causation, which are projected by *māyā*, create *samsāra* and account for its unreality. *Māyā* itself is unreal.

The perception of difference is the cause of fear and grief. "The brāhmin rejects one who knows him as different from the Self. The kshattriya rejects one who knows him as different from the Self. The worlds reject one who knows them as different from the Self. The gods reject one who knows them as different from the Self. The beings reject one who knows them as different from the Self. The All rejects one who knows it as different from the Self. This brāhmin, this kshattriya, these worlds, these gods, these beings, and this All are the Self."⁷³ "That which is the subtle essence (the root of all)—in It all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self. And thou, O Śvetaketu, art It."⁷⁴

There are passages in the Upanishads which, in order to emphasize the sole reality of Brahman, describe all objects as Its manifestations or expressions. "As a spider moves along the thread [that it produces], and as from a fire tiny sparks fly in all directions, so from the Self emanate all organs and all the worlds, all gods, all beings."⁷⁵

"This Brahmā, this Indra, this Creator, all these gods, these five great elements—earth, air, space, water, fire—and all these small creatures, these other creatures, these seeds of creation, and these egg-born, these womb-born, these sweat-born, these earth-born, horses, cows, men, elephants, and whatever else breathes and moves, or flies—as well as whatever is immovable—these all are guided by Knowledge (Pra-

⁷³ *Br. Up. II. iv. 6.*

⁷⁴ *Chh. Up. VI. xii. 3.*

⁷⁵ *Br. Up. II. i. 20.*

jnānam) and supported by Knowledge. The universe has Knowledge for its eyes. Knowledge is the foundation. Knowledge is Brahman."⁷⁶

Since the apparent multiplicity is in essence Brahman, one must understand Brahman to understand the universe. "By the realization of the Self, my dear, through hearing, reflection, and meditation, all this is known."⁷⁷ The rishis of ancient times, endowed with the Knowledge of Brahman, confidently declared their omniscience. "Great householders and great knowers of the Vedas, of olden times, who knew this, declared the same, saying: 'No one can henceforth mention to us anything that we have not heard, perceived, or known.'"⁷⁸ Therefore Brahman, Absolute Being, is Ultimate Reality. "The whole universe is filled by this Person (Purusha), to whom there is nothing superior, from whom there is nothing different, than whom there is nothing smaller or larger, who stands alone, silent as a tree, established in His resplendent glory."⁷⁹

BRAHMAN AS CHIT (CONSCIOUSNESS)

Many philosophers in the East and the West have come to the conclusion that the soul is to be conceived of as something similar to reason, spirit, thought, or intelligence. The very conception of Ātman in the Upanishads implies that the First Principle of things must above all be sought in man's inmost self. The core of Yājñavalkya's teachings in the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* is that Brahman, or Ātman, is the knowing subject within us. In the fourth section of chapter three of this Upanishad, Ushasta challenges Yājñavalkya to explain "Brahman that is immediate and direct—the Self that is within all." Yājñavalkya replies with a reference to Ātman, which animates the activities of the prāna, or vital breath. Pressed further by his opponent, he answers: "You cannot see That which is the Seer of seeing; you cannot hear That which is the Hearer of hearing; you cannot think of That which is the Thinker of thought; you cannot know That which is the Knower of knowledge. This is your Self, that is within all; everything else but This is perishable."

How is the mental form of an object illumined by the light of Ātman? The image of an object is carried to the brain by a sense-organ,

⁷⁶ *At. Up.* III. i. 3.

⁷⁷ *Br. Up.* II. iv. 5.

⁷⁸ *Chh. Up.* VI. iv. 5.

⁷⁹ *Śoet. Up.* III. 9.

for instance the eye. After passing through various sheaths (kośas),⁸⁰ it reaches at last, according to the Hindu psychologists, the sheath of the intellect. There the light of Brahman, or the Self, which is reflected in the intellect, illumines the mental state regarding the object, and thus one becomes aware of it. The mental image of the object is transformed into knowledge of the object. But this mental state is impermanent; therefore the consciousness—which in reality is Brahman—associated with the mental state appears to be impermanent.

A colourless crystal, as we have said, in the proximity of flowers of different hues appears to be blue, red, yellow, or pink. Likewise, Pure Consciousness, which is a man's inmost Self, when associated with the upādhis of different mental states, appears in different forms. One has the knowledge of a tree, a house, a stone, or any other object, and consciousness appears in association with these objects. Or one feels happy, unhappy, greedy, lustful, or angry, and again consciousness appears only in association. One believes that the Self is happy or unhappy. These emotions, however, do not pertain to the Self. They belong only to the mind, and the mind is not Ātman, though it is the instrument through which the Consciousness of Ātman manifests itself. Consciousness, which is a homogeneous entity, is in itself eternal, not discontinuous. It remains the same in past, present, and future. It does not come into existence, nor is it ever destroyed. This Consciousness is Brahman.

Generally the experiences in the waking state are different from the experiences of a dream, and these again from those of deep sleep. But the Consciousness that illumines all the three mental states never changes. The most graphic exposition of Ātman as the Knowing Subject, persisting without change through the states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, death, rebirth, and the final Liberation of the soul, is given in the third section of the fourth chapter of the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*. Here King Janaka asks of Yājñavalkya: "What serves a man for a light?" The sage first gives the simple answer that the sun serves a man for light: by the light of the sun he sits, goes out, works, and returns home. When, however, the sun has set? asks the king. The moon, replies the sage. And when the moon also has set?—Fire. And when the fire is extinguished?—The voice. But when the voice also is silenced? At last Yājñavalkya has to give the real answer. Then "the Self serves as his light. It is through the

⁸⁰ See *Self-Knowledge*, by Swami Nikhilananda, p. 81 ff.

light of the Self that he sits, goes out, works, and returns home." What is this Self? It is the infinite Consciousness dwelling within him, in the midst of his organs, and identified with his intellect. It is the light within his heart. It roams through the world of waking and dreaming, assuming the likeness of the intellect. It moves through this life and the hereafter and shares in their experiences of good and evil. In dreams it puts aside the waking body and creates a dream body. It creates dream objects: chariots, animals, and roads; pleasures, joys, and delights; lakes, pools, and rivers. The Self is the creator in the dream and Itself is the light to illumine the dream objects. It enjoys Itself in the company of women, laughing; sometimes It sees frightful things. Afterwards the Self moves into a state of deep sleep and there experiences complete rest and peace, owing to the absence of subject and object and of desires. Like a great fish swimming alternately to both banks of a river, the infinite Self moves to both these states, dreaming and waking; then, just as a hawk or a falcon flying in the sky becomes tired and, stretching its wings, proceeds, soaring, to its nest, so does the infinite Self proceed to the state of deep sleep, where It feels no desires and sees no dreams. In that state the Self has no consciousness of objects and yet is not unconscious.

But nevertheless, though moving—as it were—through the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, or through different births, the Self remains—in reality—untouched by their experiences; for "nothing cleaves to the Self."

It is the inner Consciousness, the Self, that is the real agent of perception; the senses are mere instruments. "He who knows: 'Let me smell this'—he is Ātman; the nose is the instrument of smelling. He who knows: 'Let me say this'—he is Ātman; the tongue is the instrument of saying. He who knows: 'Let me hear this'—he is Ātman; the ear is the instrument of hearing. He who knows: 'Let me think this'—he is Ātman; the mind is his divine eye."⁸¹ "Into Him, as eye, all forms are gathered; by the eye He reaches all forms. Into Him, as ear, all sounds are gathered; by the ear He reaches all sounds."

As Brahman is the essence of Being, so It is the essence of Consciousness or Light. Brahman needs no other light to illumine Itself. It is self-luminous. "It is pure; It is the Light of lights; It is That which they know who know the Self."⁸² All material objects, such as trees, rivers,

⁸¹ *Chh. Up.* VIII. xii. 4-5.

⁸² *Mu. Up.* II. ii. 9.

houses, forests, are illumined by the sun. But the light that illumines the sun is the light of Brahman. "The sun does not shine there, nor the moon and the stars, nor these lightnings, not to speak of this fire. When He shines, everything shines after Him; by His light everything is lighted."⁸³

BRAHMAN AS ĀNANDAM (BLISS)

"He perceived that Bliss is Brahman."⁸⁴ The *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* describes Brahman as Consciousness and Bliss.⁸⁵ Bliss is not an attribute of Brahman; it is Brahman Itself. Brahman as Bliss means that Bliss is Its very being, as is Consciousness. Brahman is the immeasurable ocean of Bliss—the Bliss that knows no change. It is important to remember that no real Bliss is possible without Knowledge or Consciousness—*natu jñānād bhinnam sukhamasti*.

Needless to say, the Bliss that is the very substance of Brahman is not to be confused with the happiness that a man experiences when in contact with an agreeable sense-object. Worldly bliss is but an infinitesimal part of the Bliss of Brahman, the Bliss of Brahman coming through an earthly medium.

The Bliss of Brahman pervades all objects. Without it a man could not live. "He who is self-created is Bliss. A man experiences happiness by tasting that Bliss. Who could breathe, who could live, if that Bliss did not exist in his heart?"⁸⁶ For a more vivid description: "It is not for the sake of the husband, my dear, that the husband is loved, but for the sake of the Self that he is loved. It is not for the sake of the wife, my dear, that the wife is loved, but for the sake of the Self that she is loved. It is not for the sake of the sons, my dear, that the sons are loved, but for the sake of the Self that they are loved. It is not for the sake of wealth, my dear, that wealth is loved, but for the sake of the Self that it is loved."⁸⁷ The same formula is repeated in reference to the brāhmin and kshatriya castes, the worlds, the gods, created beings, and all things. Then the magnificent passage concludes with the following exhortation: "The Self, my dear Maitreyi, should be realized—should be heard about, reflected on, and meditated upon. By

⁸³ *Mu. Up.* II. ii. 10.

⁸⁴ *Tat. Up.* III. vi. 1.

⁸⁵ III. ix. 28.

⁸⁶ *Tat. Up.* II. vii. 1.

⁸⁷ *Br. Up.* II. iv. 5.

the realization of the Self, my dear, through hearing, reflection, and meditation, all this [world] is known."

Brahman is Bliss because in It there is an utter absence of sorrow and also because It is Infinity. Anything that is not Brahman is full of suffering—*ato anyad ārtam*. "The Self is free from sin, free from old age, from death and grief, from hunger and thirst, imagining nothing but what It ought to imagine, and desiring nothing but what It ought to desire. He is the Highest Lord, He is the supreme Master of all beings, the Guardian of all beings, a boundary keeping all things apart and in their right places."⁸⁸

Brahman is Bliss because It is Infinity. That which is Infinity is Bliss; there is no bliss in the finite. Of the blissful Ātman it is said: "Joy is His head, satisfaction is His right side, great satisfaction is His left side, bliss is His trunk, and Brahman is His support."⁸⁹ "He who knows the Bliss of Brahman—from which all speech, together with the mind, turns away, unable to reach It—fears nothing."⁹⁰

An experience known to all, which gives an idea of the Bliss of Brahman, is the state of deep sleep.⁹¹ At that time the Self remains bereft of desire, fear, and evil. It remains completely unrelated to the world. Its bliss is due to the absence of all consciousness of duality. "As a man fully embraced by his loving wife does not know anything at all, either external or internal, so does this Infinite Being (the Self) fully embraced by the Supreme Self not know anything at all, either external or internal. . . . In this state a father is no father, a mother no mother, the worlds are no worlds, the gods no gods, the Vedas no Vedas. In this state a thief is no thief, the killer of a noble brāhmin no killer, a chandāla no chandāla,⁹² a paulkasa no paulkasa,⁹³ a monk no monk, a hermit no hermit. [When in this form he] is untouched by good work and untouched by evil work, for he has then overcome all the sorrows of his heart (intellect)."⁹⁴

There is a difference, however, between deep sleep and the experience of Brahman. The infinite Bliss of Brahman simply cannot be conceived of by the finite mind.

⁸⁸ *Mai. Up.* VII. 7.

⁸⁹ *Tai. Up.* II. 5.

⁹⁰ *Tai. Up.* II. 9.

⁹¹ See pp. 93-94.

⁹² The son of a śudra father and a brāhmin mother.

⁹³ The son of a śudra father and a kshatriya mother.

⁹⁴ *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 21-22.

"Now this is an examination of what is meant by Bliss (Ānandam): Let there be a noble young man who is well read [in the Vedas], very swift, firm, and strong, and let the whole world be full of wealth for him—that is one measure of human bliss.

"One hundred times that human bliss is one measure of the bliss of human gandharvas, and likewise of a great sage [learned in the Vedas] and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the human gandharvas is one measure of the bliss of divine gandharvas, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the divine gandharvas is one measure of the bliss of the Fathers, enjoying their celestial life, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the Fathers is one measure of the bliss of the devas who are endowed with heavenly bodies through the merit of their lawful duties, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the devas is one measure of the bliss of the devas who are endowed with heavenly bodies through the merit of their Vedic sacrifices, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the sacrificial gods is one measure of the bliss of the thirty-three devas who live on the sacrificial offerings, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the thirty-three devas is one measure of the bliss of Indra,⁹⁵ and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of Indra is one measure of the bliss of Brihaspati,⁹⁶ and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of Brihaspati is one measure of the bliss of Prajāpati,⁹⁷ and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of Prajāpati is one measure of the Bliss of Brahman, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires."⁹⁸

⁹⁵ The king of the gods.

⁹⁶ The spiritual preceptor of the gods.

⁹⁷ The first manifestation of the Absolute, known as the World Soul.

⁹⁸ *Tai. Up.* II. viii. 1-4.

In other words, the Bliss of Brahman cannot be measured by any relative standard, human or otherwise. Through the performance of the sacrifices prescribed in the scriptures, one may experience, after death, measures of this bliss in ascending degrees in the different heavenly worlds. But if one assimilates the teachings of the Vedas and renounces desire through the practice of spiritual discipline, one can enjoy those measures of bliss here on earth. Moreover, if a sage is completely free from desires, and gains Self-Knowledge, he attains the full Bliss of Brahman before death. His mind has transcended the horizon of the finite and become identical with the Consciousness of Being.

The experience of deep sleep, which is free from desires, fears, and evils, is not a permanent realization. A man loses it on awakening, whereupon he returns to the world of the pairs of opposites. Through the practice of spiritual discipline, however, one can attain the Knowledge of Brahman permanently and enjoy without interruption that superlative Bliss.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION ON NIRGUNA BRAHMAN

We have tried above to indicate something of the nature of Nirguna Brahman, the Unconditioned Brahman or Pure Consciousness, as discussed in the Upanishads. It is a negation of all attributes and relations. It is beyond time, space, and causality. Though It is spaceless, yet without It space could not exist; though It is timeless, yet without It time could not exist; though It is causeless, yet without It the universe, bound by the law of cause and effect, could not exist. Only if one admits the existence of Nirguna Brahman as an unchanging substratum can one understand proximity in space, succession in time, and the interdependence in the chain of causality. Without the unchanging white screen, one cannot relate in time or space the disjointed pictures in a cinema film. No description of It is possible except by the denial of all empirical attributes, definitions, and relations: *Neti, neti*—"Not this, not this."

Obviously Nirguna Brahman cannot be worshipped, prayed to, or meditated upon. No relationship whatsoever can be established with It. Yet It is not altogether detached; for It is the very foundation of relative existence. It is "the setu (dike) that keeps asunder these worlds to prevent their clashing together. This setu neither day nor night crosses, nor old age, nor death, nor suffering." It is the intangible Unity

that pervades all relative existence and gives a strong metaphysical foundation to fellowship, love, unselfishness, and other ethical disciplines. Being the immortal Essence of every man, It compels us to show respect to all, in spite of their illusory masks. Though It cannot be an object of formal devotion, yet It gives reality to the gods, being their inner substance, and thus binds together all worshippers in the common quest of Truth.

Nirguna Brahman is the basis of Saguna Brahman, or the Personal God, who is immanent in the universe and conditioned by *māyā*. Without compulsion from outside, Brahman imposes upon Itself, as it were, a limit and thus becomes manifest as God, soul, and world. Creation, preservation, and destruction are the activities of Saguna Brahman, mere waves on the surface of the ocean, which can never touch the serene depths of the attributeless Reality. It is Saguna Brahman by whom all things have been created, and by whom, after being created, they are sustained, and into whom, in the end, they are absorbed.

SAGUNA BRAHMAN

When Brahman becomes conditioned by the upādhi of *māyā* and shrinks, as it were, because of that *māyā*, It is called Saguna Brahman, the conditioned Brahman. It must not, however, be forgotten that the conditioning is not real, but only apparent. *Māyā* is conceived of as Brahman's inscrutable power; in association with *māyā*, Brahman becomes the dynamic Creator of the universe. Rāmānuja describes the world-bewitching *māyā* as "a screen that hides the true nature of the Lord." When the curtain of *māyā* is rung down, the effulgence of Brahman seems to be dimmed; when it goes up, Brahman shines in Its fullest glory. "That non-dual God, who spontaneously covers Himself, like a spider, with the web produced from His prakriti . . ." "Know prakriti (nature) to be *māyā* and the Great God its Lord."⁹⁹

Like the ocean, Brahman appears to us in two aspects. Nirguna Brahman is without a wave or ripple. Saguna Brahman is the ocean agitated by the wind, covered by foaming waves. The tranquil ocean is sometimes agitated. Brahman, too, in essence inactive and quiescent, sometimes—as it were—is active and turbulent. But Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman are not two realities. The sea is the same, whether it is peaceful or agitated. A snake is the same, whether it remains

⁹⁹ *Śvet. Up.* VI. 10.

¹⁰⁰ *Śvet. Up.* IV. 10.

coiled up or wriggles about. Māyā, as we shall presently see, has no independent reality. It inheres in Brahman, as the power of Brahman. Fire's power of burning cannot be conceived of as in essence different from fire.

MĀYĀ IN THE VEDAS

The doctrine of māyā can be traced to the Rig-Veda. The word actually occurs there and denotes a kind of magic: "Indra, through māyā, assumes various forms." In the Upanishadic philosophy this concept is applied to the sphere of metaphysics and thus enlarged. Without māyā such ideas as the unity of existence, the reality of Ātman, and the unreality of the universe independent of Ātman, as discussed in the Upanishads, become meaningless. It was, however, later Vedāntists, like Vyāsa, Gauḍapāda, Śankara, and Rāmānuja, who fully developed the doctrine and embodied it in their respective systems of thought.¹⁰¹

The Rig-Veda speaks of two orders of experience. The one is that of duality, or multiplicity, which is known to us in our everyday life through the sense-organs. The other is that of unity or non-duality, which is direct, immediate, and intuitive, that is to say, comprehended without the instrumentality of sense-organs or discursive reasoning. Multiplicity is said to be impermanent, finite, and circumscribed by a beginning and an end. It is depreciated by the Vedic seers as the source of grief, evil, and suffering. Non-duality, on the other hand, is eternal, infinite, immortal, and everlasting. It is identical with Absolute Reality (Sat), Consciousness (Chit), and Bliss (Ānandam). It is praised as the bestower of Bliss and as the Highest Good. The attainment of non-duality is the goal of spiritual evolution. Whatever reality the manifold phenomena possess is empirical and illusory, *vyāvahārika*; but non-duality is *pāramārthika*, absolute and immutable.

The Rig-Veda identifies non-duality with Reality, or the First Principle. "The Reality is one: sages call It by various names."¹⁰² The *Chhāndogya Upanishad* describes multiplicity as a "mere matter of words." "The One besides which there is no other."¹⁰³ "The One, inserted into the everlasting nave, in which all living beings are

¹⁰¹ See *Self-Knowledge*, by Swami Nikhilananda, p. 45 ff.

¹⁰² *Ri. I.* cbiv. 46.

¹⁰³ *Ri. X.* cxxix. 2.

fixed."¹⁰⁴ "This entire universe is the Purusha alone, both that which was and that which endures for the future."¹⁰⁵

The celebrated Hymn of Creation, known as the Nāsadiya Sukta,¹⁰⁶ indicates that the multiple names and forms of the visible universe, prior to the state of manifestation, were in a state of non-duality:

Then there was neither Aught nor Nought, no
air nor sky beyond.
What covered all? Where rested all? In watery
gulf profound?
Nor death was then, nor deathlessness, nor
change of night and day.
That One breathed calmly, self-sustained;
nought else beyond It lay.
Gloom hid in gloom existed first—one
sea, eluding view.
That One, a void in chaos wrapt, by
inward fervour grew.¹⁰⁷

The diversity or plurality that we encounter in our daily life is māyā, non-existent from the standpoint of Ultimate Reality.

MĀYĀ IN THE UPANISHADS

The Upanishads reveal a systematic search, on the part of the seers, to discover the essential nature, or First Principle, of the universe. They came to the decision that the essence of things is not given in the objects as they present themselves to our senses in space and time. The entire aggregate of experience, external and internal, shows us merely how things appear to us, not how they are in themselves. Like the Greek philosophers Parmenides and Plato, who asserted the empirical reality to be a mere show, or shadow of reality, the Upanishads declared that the world is only māyā and that empirical knowledge does not give true Knowledge, or Vidyā, but belongs to the realm of ignorance, or avidyā. The Upanishadic philosophers, through a rigorous process of discrimination, analysed both the individual and the universe. All that does not belong to the inalienable substance of things they considered as non-Self and stripped away. The conclusion arrived at was that the "great,

¹⁰⁴ *Ri. X.* lxxxii. 6.

¹⁰⁵ *Ri. X.* xc. 2.

¹⁰⁶ *Ri. X.* cxxix.

¹⁰⁷ Surendranath Dasgupta, *Indian Idealism*, p. 4. Cambridge, London 1933.

omnipresent Ātman,¹⁰⁸ which is "greater than heaven, space, and earth,"¹⁰⁹ is, at the same time, present—"small as a corn of rice,"¹¹⁰ whole and undivided—in man's own self. The Universal Self is identical with the individual self.

The crux of the philosophy of Yājñavalkya, as presented in the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣhad*, is the sole reality of Ātman and the unreality of the universe independent of Ātman. "It is not for the sake of the husband, my dear, that the husband is loved, but for the sake of the Self that he is loved. . . . By the realization of the Self, my dear, through hearing, reflection, and meditation, all this [world] is known."¹¹¹ As the notes of a drum, a conch-shell, or a lute have no existence in themselves and can be perceived only when the instrument that produces them is played, so all objects and relations in the universe are known by him who knows Ātman.¹¹² Ātman, or the Self, is the consciousness, the knowing subject, within us. All objects and relationships in the universe exist for us, and are known and loved by us, only in so far as they enter into our consciousness, which comprehends in itself all the objects and relationships, knowing nothing that is absolutely alien to itself. "As from a fire tiny sparks fly in all directions, so from this Self emanate all the organs and all the worlds, all gods, all beings."¹¹³ "Just as all the spokes are fixed in the nave and the felloe of a chariot wheel, so are all beings, all gods, all worlds, all organs, and all these [individual selves] fixed in this Self."¹¹⁴ If Ātman, the knowing subject in us, is the only reality, there can be no universe outside consciousness. Therefore the duality perceived in the universe, independent of Ātman, is māyā. This idea is reiterated in the Upaniṣhads, again and again.¹¹⁵

A well-known prayer in the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣhad* begs the Lord to lead the devotee from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from death to Immortality.¹¹⁶ What is referred to here as

¹⁰⁸ *Tai. Br.* III. xii. 9. 7.

¹⁰⁹ *Śa. Br.* X. vi. 2.

¹¹⁰ *Śa. Br.* X. vi. 2.

¹¹¹ *Br. Up.* II. iv. 5; compare p. 45.

¹¹² See *Br. Up.* II. iv. 7-9.

¹¹³ *Br. Up.* II. i. 20.

¹¹⁴ *Br. Up.* II. v. 15.

¹¹⁵ See *Ka. Up.* II. i. 10-11; *Śvet. Up.* IV. 10; *Mu. Up.* I. i. 3; *Mat. Up.* VI. 24.

¹¹⁶ *Br. Up.* I. iii. 28.

unreality, darkness, and death is duality, which is māyā. Non-duality, Ātman, alone is Reality, Light, and Immortality.

The *Īśa Upaniṣhad* states that the "door of the Truth" is veiled with a "golden disc."¹¹⁷ This veil must be removed that the seeker may behold the Truth. The figure of a veil or curtain has often been used by Vedāntic philosophers to describe māyā. But it must be understood that Brahman, or Ātman, is not to be sought *on the other side* of māyā; for there is no such thing as space beyond the sphere of māyā. Nor is It to be realized *after* the veil is removed; for beyond māyā there is no time. Nor, finally, is It to be known as the *cause* of the universe; for Brahman is beyond the causal law. Rather, Brahman becomes real to us to the extent that the universe, with its time, space, and causal principle, is realized as unreal. That is to say, Brahman becomes real to the extent that we can shake off from our minds the world of appearance.

The *Kaṭha Upaniṣhad* teaches that sages never find reality and certainty in the unrealities and uncertainties of the world.¹¹⁸ Yājñavalkya exhorts the seekers of Brahman to renounce the longing for "children, wealth, and the heavenly world."¹¹⁹ The *Mundaka Upaniṣhad* states that when Brahman is realized "the fetters of the heart are broken and all doubts are resolved."¹²⁰

LATER PHILOSOPHERS

It has already been stated that the doctrine of māyā was developed in the Vedānta philosophy, in a systematic form, by later thinkers. The implications of the doctrine have been distorted and misunderstood by its critics, Indian as well as Western. They tell us that if one accepts the concept of māyā one must believe that the world is unreal and non-existent, that life on earth is full of suffering, and that Liberation consists in turning away from it; that human values are totally worthless, and that to seek happiness on earth is to pursue a will-o'-the-wisp.

Proper understanding of the philosophy of Non-dualistic Vedānta depends upon the recognition of the two standpoints from which Truth can be observed. The one is the relative standpoint; the other, the absolute. The former regards time, space, and causation as actual. From this standpoint the field of multiplicity is real. Good and evil exist, and

¹¹⁷ *Īś. Up.* 15.

¹¹⁸ See *Ka. Up.* II. i. 2.

¹¹⁹ *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 22.

¹²⁰ *Mu. Up.* II. ii. 8.

so also pleasure and pain; the gods, heaven, and the after-life all are real. The Indo-Āryans sought celestial happiness by propitiating the deities through sacrifice, according to the directions of the Vedas. "This is the truth: The sacrificial works which were revealed to the rishis in the hymns have been described in many ways in the three Vedas. Practise them, being desirous to attain their true results. This is your path leading to the fruits of your works."¹²¹

Admitting the empirical reality of the individual ego and the manifold universe, the Vedic seers developed an elaborate system of theology, cosmology, ethics, spiritual disciplines, and methods of worship. Their division of Hindu society into four castes, and of the individual life into four stages, was based upon their recognition of the relative world. Their acknowledgement of the ideals of righteousness (dharma), wealth (artha), sense pleasure (kāma), and final Liberation (moksha) as worthy human pursuits (purushārtha) shows that they appreciated human values and were solicitous for human happiness. Had they considered the world to be non-existent or unreal, like a "barren woman's son," such injunctions as they laid down for these four ends of life would have been meaningless. Nevertheless, this world is not real from the standpoint of the Absolute, or Brahman; for duality disappears when the absolute Truth is known, and all the activities and thoughts associated with duality drop away. The teaching of Vedānta demonstrates the ultimate reality of Brahman. *Sarvam khalvidam Brahma*—"All that exists is Brahman."

Non-dualists describe the creation as the illusory superimposition (adhyāropa or vivarta), through māyā, of names and forms upon Brahman. They explain this subtle concept by means of various illustrations. One or two may be cited here. Karna, a hero of the *Mahābhārata*, was a son of Kunti, born before her marriage. In order to avoid a scandal, she put the baby in a pot and floated it down the river. The baby was picked up by a carpenter's wife named Rādhā and brought up by her as her own son. As a result Karna was known to himself and others as Rādhā-putra, Rādhā's son. Many years later his true parentage was revealed and he came to be called Kunti-putra, Kunti's son. Through ignorance Karna was given the epithet of Rādhā-putra. This is a case of illusory superimposition. There is also the story of the lion cub born in a flock of sheep. It bleated, ate grass, and regarded itself in all respects as a sheep. One day it was pounced upon by a lion from the

¹²¹ *Mu. Up.* I. ii. 1.

forest and dragged to the water. There it was shown its reflection and a piece of meat was pressed into its mouth. Then suddenly the veil dropped off and the sheep-lion discovered itself to be a real lion. Through the power of māyā, or ignorance, names and forms are attributed to Brahman and the relative universe comes into existence. Through the negation (apavāda) of the illusory manifold, Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, is revealed again. The true nature of Brahman is not in the least affected by the superimposition of illusory notions.

Relativity is māyā. The fact that the One appears as the many, the Absolute as the relative, the Infinite as the finite, is māyā. The doctrine of māyā recognizes the reality of multiplicity from the relative standpoint—and simply states that the relationship of this relative reality with the Absolute cannot be described or known. How it can be that the infinite Brahman should appear as the finite world cannot be grasped by the finite mind; the very limitation of the mind precludes a satisfactory answer to this question. In fact, there is no relationship between the One and the many, since there can be a relationship only between two existing entities. The One and the many do not exist, however, in the same sense. When a man sees the One, he does not see the many; when he sees the non-dual Brahman, he does not see the universe. When anyone, seeing the manifold universe, establishes a relationship of any kind between it and the non-dual Brahman, the Non-dualists call that notion of relationship māyā. A mirage is māyā; so also its relationship with the desert. It is due to māyā that one sees a snake in place of a rope, water in the desert, and multiplicity in place of the non-dual Brahman. Vedāntists admit that for our practical life there is a difference between illusions, dreams, and the experiences of the waking state, yet insist that from the standpoint of the Absolute they are all equally unreal.

Sankara described māyā as the "power of the Lord"—*paramēśa śakti*. It is the inscrutable power of Brahman, resting in Brahman and having no existence independent of Brahman. This is illustrated by fire and its power of burning. Māyā makes possible the appearance of the manifold universe, and it endows names and forms with apparent reality. Non-dualists ascribe creation, preservation, and destruction to Saguna Brahman, or Brahman associated with māyā. Sadānanda defines māyā as "something positive, though intangible, which cannot be described either as being or as non-being, which is made of three gunas, and

which is antagonistic to Knowledge."¹²² Māyā and also its effect, the universe, have a positive existence and cannot be called unreal, like the "horns of a hare." They are seen to exist from the relative standpoint but are non-existent from the standpoint of Brahman. Māyā and its manifestations disappear with the dawn of the Knowledge of Brahman.

Māyā consists of three gunas, namely, sattva, rajas, and tamas. The word guna is generally translated—though incorrectly—as "quality." Essentially the gunas are the very substance of māyā. Everything in nature consists of these three gunas, though in varying degrees. Rajas and tamas have opposing characteristics, while sattva strikes the balance between the two. The principal trait of rajas is energy, which is responsible for the "primal flow of activity"; the power of rajas moves the universe. Tamas is lassitude, dullness, inertia, and stupidity; while sattva, which is characterized by harmony, is manifest, on the human level, in such spiritual virtues as tranquillity, self-control, and contentment.

The Upanishads mention the three gunas: "The one she-goat—red, white, and black—casts many young ones, which are fashioned like to her."¹²³ The *Chhândogya Upanishad*¹²⁴ states that everything in the universe consists of three elements, namely, heat, water, and food. There are present in all things—for instance, in fire, in the sun, in the moon, and in lightning—the red heat, the white water, and the black food. Śankara explains the passage thus: "In this verse, by the words red, white, and black are to be understood rajas, sattva, and tamas. The red is rajas (emotion), because it naturally makes red; the white is sattva (essentiality, goodness), because it naturally makes bright; the black is tamas (darkness), because it naturally darkens." The passage, "The she-goat . . . casts many young ones, which are fashioned like to her," means that all the effects of māyā also are constituted of the three gunas.

Māyā functions in the world through its two powers: the power of concealment and the power of projection. The former, as in the case of a sleeping person, obscures the knowledge of the observer; it conceals, as it were, the true nature of Brahman. Next the projecting power of māyā creates the universe and all the objects seen in it, just as, after

¹²² *Vedāntasāra* 34.

¹²³ *Śvet. Up.* IV. 5.

¹²⁴ VI. iv. 1.

a man's consciousness is obscured by sleep, he begins to dream. In actuality, however, the two powers of māyā function practically simultaneously. Therefore Brahman, in association with māyā, may be called, as it were, the Creator or Projector of the universe.

It is through māyā that Brahman, which is the eternal Subject, becomes an object of knowledge. Māyā obscures the reality of Brahman: the Self, in reality ever free and infinite, regards Itself as a finite entity, bound to the world. Seeking Liberation, this finite self practises spiritual disciplines such as study of scripture, self-control, and concentration—all of which have their validity in the world of māyā—and at last realizes Brahman, its true infinite Self. This means that as the veil of māyā is destroyed, the everlasting Light of Brahman reveals Itself.

Māyā, ajnāna (ignorance), avidyā (nescience), and prakriti (nature) are practically synonymous. Māyā generally signifies the cosmic illusion on account of which Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, appears as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the universe. It is under the influence of avidyā that Ātman, or Pure Consciousness, appears as the jiva, or individual self. Ajnāna makes the Absolute appear as the relative, the One as the many. Prakriti is the stuff of matter, that out of which the universe is evolved. But Vedāntic writers do not always strictly maintain these distinctions.

MODES OF MĀYĀ

There are two ways of looking at māyā, depending upon one's point of view. From the collective or cosmic point of view, māyā is one; from the individual point of view, it is many. To give an illustration: One can regard a number of trees from the collective standpoint and describe them as a wood, or one can regard a wood from the standpoint of the trees and describe it as a number of trees. Likewise Vedāntists speak of collective or cosmic māyā and of individual māyā. The cosmic māyā is associated with Ívara (Saguna Brahman) and forms His upādhi; the individual māyā limits the jiva, or individual soul, and becomes its upādhi. Māyā, both in its cosmic and in its individual aspect, hides the true nature of Brahman. Thus it becomes the upādhi, or limiting adjunct, of Brahman. But the infinite Brahman can never be limited; therefore this limitation is only apparent, and not real. The formless sky appears to possess sharp lines when viewed through the jagged peaks of a mountain. In association with upādhis, Brahman appears as stones, trees, birds, animals, men, gods, the Creator. When the upādhi is dis-

carded, the object formerly regarded as finite by the ignorant is realized as Brahman.

Brahman, that is to say, Saguna Brahman, is the cause of the universe. Creation, as already explained, is the superimposition of names and forms through māyā. Therefore Brahman, through association with māyā, appears to be endowed with such activities as creation, preservation, and destruction, and such attributes as omniscience, omnipotence, and lordship. Brahman uses māyā as the material of creation; that is to say, It creates the universe and its various objects out of māyā. Māyā has no existence independent of the Lord; therefore, from the standpoint of māyā, Brahman is the material cause of the universe. But, as Pure Consciousness, It is the efficient cause. This causal relation is often explained by the illustration of the spider and its web. When the spider wants to weave a web, it uses the silk which belongs to it and without which it cannot weave. Therefore the spider, as a conscious creature, is the efficient cause of the web, while from the standpoint of the silk it is the material cause. It must be remembered, however, that no causal relationship, in the usual sense of the term, can exist between Pure Brahman, or the Absolute, and the universe of names and forms.

The first element to evolve from Saguna Brahman is ākāśa, which is usually translated as "space" or "sky," and sometimes as "ether." The creation, or evolution, of ākāśa really means that Brahman, in association with māyā, appears as ākāśa. From ākāśa evolves air (vāyu); that is to say, Brahman, in association with māyā, appearing as ākāśa, further appears as air. From air evolves fire (agni); from fire, water (ap); from water, earth (prithivi). The five elements thus evolved are not the gross elements that we see, but they are subtle, rudimentary, and unmixed. Out of these subtle elements are produced the subtle bodies of all created beings and also the gross elements. The subtle body consists of the organs of perception, the organs of action, the prānas, the mind, and the buddhi. From the gross elements is produced the gross universe, with all the various physical objects contained therein. Both the totality of the subtle bodies and the gross universe are upādhis of Brahman and appear to limit It. In association with them, Pure Consciousness descends, as it were, into the realm of relativity and is known by such epithets as Hiranyagarbha and Virāt.

ASPECTS OF SAGUNA BRAHMAN

When Vedānta speaks of Brahman as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer, it refers to Saguna, not Nirguna, Brahman. "That whence

these beings are born, That by which, when born, they live, That into which they enter at death—try to know That. That is Brahman."¹²⁵ The creation does not exhaust the whole of Brahman; as we have seen, He is transcendent as well. Some Vedāntists associate Sat (Reality), Chit (Consciousness), and Ānandam (Bliss) with Saguna Brahman and give Him, not Nirguna Brahman, the name of Sachchidānanda.

With reference to His three activities of creation, preservation, and destruction, Saguna Brahman is known, respectively, as Brahmā, Vishnu, and Rudra, or Śiva. These form the Trimurti, the Trinity of Hinduism. The influence of rajas is seen in creation, of sattva in preservation, and of tamas in destruction. Kālidāsa, the great Hindu dramatist writes: "That which, before creation, is the non-dual Brahman becomes subject to māyā and assumes, in association with the three upādhis, the forms of Brahmā, Vishnu, and Śiva."

Nirguna Brahman, as already remarked, cannot be the object of prayer or meditation, but Saguna Brahman can. "By the yogins He is realized through worship."¹²⁶ "It is seen by subtle seers through their one-pointed and subtle intellects."¹²⁷ "A calm person, wishing for Immortality, beholds the Inner Self with his eyes closed."¹²⁸

Many sublime passages are found in the Upanishads and other writings of the Hindu seers, describing the glories of Saguna Brahman:

"Grasping without hands, hastening without feet, He sees without eyes, He hears without ears. He knows what can be known, but no one knows Him. They call Him the first, the great Person."¹²⁹

"He is the Lord of all; He is the knower of all; He is the controller within; He is the source of all; and He is that from which all things originate and in which they finally disappear."¹³⁰

"It is the Controller of all, the Lord of all, the Ruler of all. It does not become better through good work or worse through bad work."¹³¹

"He is the fountain of all blessed qualities and the consummation of such divine attributes as power, strength, glory, knowledge, and virility. By a fraction of His power He upholds all beings. He is the

¹²⁵ *Tat. Up.* III. 1.

¹²⁶ *Br. Su.* III. ii. 24.

¹²⁷ *Ka. Up.* I. iii. 12.

¹²⁸ *Ka. Up.* II. i. 1.

¹²⁹ *Śvet. Up.* III. 19.

¹³⁰ *Mā. Up.* 6.

¹³¹ *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 22.

Supreme Lord, greater than the Great, and free from the least trace of suffering."¹³²

"Everywhere are His eyes, everywhere is His mouth, everywhere are His arms, everywhere His feet. He has endowed men with arms, and birds with wings. He is the Creator of earth and heaven. He is one and without a second."¹³³

"Devoid of senses, yet reflecting the qualities of all the senses, He is the Lord of all and the Ruler of all; He is the great refuge of all."¹³⁴

"He is above the World Tree and beyond time; He is the Other from whom this world proceeds and around whom it moves. The giver of virtue, the remover of evil, the Lord of powers—know Him in your own self as the immortal Abode of all.

"He who is the supreme Lord of lords, the supreme Deity of deities, the supreme Ruler of rulers—Him let us know as God, adorable and paramount, the Lord of the world.

"Neither body nor organ is found in Him. There is not seen His equal or His superior. His exalted powers are innate and various: they are knowledge, will, and action."¹³⁵

Saguna Brahman was later worshipped under various personifications—as Śiva, Vishnu, Rāma, and so on, the ideal deities (ishta devatās) of various Hindu sects. In the Upanishads He is described as Maheshvara, the Great Lord, and also as Īśa, Īśāna, and Īśvara—all meaning the Lord.

ĪŚVARA (THE LORD)

Saguna Brahman is called Īśvara because He is all-powerful, the Lord of all, the Ruler of the entire universe. "He, the Lord, the bestower of blessings, the adorable God."¹³⁶ "He rules over all two-footed and four-footed beings."¹³⁷ "He rules this world eternally; for no one else is able to rule it."¹³⁸ "And that Prāna, indeed, is the Self of the conscious self (Prajñātmā), blessed, imperishable, and immortal. He does not increase

¹³² Adapted from a quotation from Smṛiti in Rāmānuja's Commentary on *Brahma Sūtras* III. ii. 11.

¹³³ *Śvet. Up.* III. 3.

¹³⁴ *Śvet. Up.* III. 17.

¹³⁵ *Śvet. Up.* VI. 6-8.

¹³⁶ *Śvet. Up.* IV. 11.

¹³⁷ *Śvet. Up.* IV. 13.

¹³⁸ *Śvet. Up.* VI. 17.

by a good action nor does He decrease by a bad action. He, indeed, makes the man whom He wishes to lead up from these worlds do a good deed; and He makes him whom He wishes to lead down from these worlds do a bad deed. And He is the Guardian of the world, He is the King of the world, He is the Lord of the universe—and He is my Self; thus let it be known, yea, thus let it be known."¹³⁹

He is the source of all powers. All created objects, and the all-powerful māyā as well, are under His control. "The non-dual Lord of māyā rules alone by His powers . . . There is one Rudra only—they do not allow a second—who rules all the worlds by His powers."¹⁴⁰

He is the Supreme Ruler of the universe. Under His control the sun, the moon, and the planets perform their allotted functions. Because of His power a moral order controls the universe as well as man's life. "Under the mighty rule of this Immutable, O Gārgi, the sun and moon are held in their positions; under the mighty rule of this Immutable, O Gārgi, heaven and earth maintain their positions; under the mighty rule of this Immutable, O Gārgi, moments, muhurtas, days and nights, fortnights, months, seasons, and years are held in their respective places. Under the mighty rule of this Immutable, some rivers flow eastward from the White Mountains; others, flowing westward, continue in that direction; and still others keep to other courses. Under the mighty rule of this Immutable, O Gārgi, men praise those that give, the gods depend upon the sacrificer, and the manes on independent offerings."¹⁴¹

This Brahman can inspire great terror, "like a thunderbolt ready to be hurled." "From terror of Him the wind blows; from terror of Him the sun rises; from terror of Him fire, Indra, and death perform their respective duties."¹⁴² He alone is the source of all powers. Wherever one sees a manifestation of power, whether on earth or in heaven, it is all from Brahman. Ajātaśatru told the proud Bālāki that the power which animates the sun, the moon, lightning, the five elements, and other objects belongs to Brahman, who alone works through them and who alone is to be known.¹⁴³ The different gods, the powerful cosmic forces, are His manifestations through māyā. They are entirely dependent upon Him. How they become powerless unless sustained by Brahman

¹³⁹ *Kau. Up.* III. 8.

¹⁴⁰ *Śvet. Up.* III. 1-2.

¹⁴¹ *Br. Up.* III. viii. 9.

¹⁴² *Tai. Up.* II. 8.

¹⁴³ See *Kau. Up.* IV. 3 ff.

is described in the third chapter of the *Kena Upanishad*. Fire, we read there, is unable to burn a wisp of straw, and the wind unable to blow it, without the consent of Brahman.

Two things are implied when it is declared that Brahman is the Ruler of the universe. First, He maintains all things in their proper places and prevents them from clashing with one another. This is the sense in which Brahman is compared to a *setu*, a dike, which separates one body of water from another. Second, as the Ruler of the universe He guides the activities of all things. He is therefore called *Antaryāmin*, the Inner Ruler. "He is the Lord of all; He is the knower of all; He is the controller within."¹⁴⁴ The sun, moon, and stars follow His behest and the gods bow before His power; for Brahman is the Inner Ruler of all things.

Brahman as *Antaryāmin* has been elaborately described in the seventh section of the third chapter of the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*. "He who inhabits the earth, but is within it, whom the earth does not know, whose body is the earth, and who controls the earth from within, is the Internal Ruler, your own immortal Self."¹⁴⁵ What is true of the earth is also true, as one learns from the continued repetition of the same formula, of water, fire, the atmosphere, the wind, the sky, the sun, and other objects. All these are bodies of Brahman, who dwells within them but is distinct from them, whom they do not know, and yet who rules them all from within. It is the power of Brahman which is behind the activities of gods, of men, and of nature. All reflect His glory. Their very life is but the throb of that Eternal Life. "This Self . . . is the Ruler of all beings and the King of all beings."

BRAHMAN AS VIDHĀTĀ (PROVIDENCE)

The seers of the Upanishads felt the necessity of a Personal God as an important factor in man's spiritual development. A man attached to the body, and influenced by love and hate, cannot meditate on the Impersonal Absolute. For his benefit, therefore, the Upanishads describe *Saguna Brahman* as the Providence who determines the course of the universe. We have already seen that *Saguna Brahman* is compared to a dike—"so that these worlds may not be confounded. Day and night do not pass that dike, nor old age, death, and grief."¹⁴⁶ "The Seer,

¹⁴⁴ *Mā. Up.* 6.

¹⁴⁵ *Br. Up.* III. vii. 3.

¹⁴⁶ *Chh. Up.* VIII. iv. 1.

omniscient, transcendent, and uncreated, He has duly allotted to the eternal World-Creators their respective duties."¹⁴⁷

The *Svetāsvatara Upanishad*, with its theistic inclination, contains many passages depicting this aspect of Brahman:

"The source of all, who determines the *gunas*, who brings to maturity whatever can be ripened, and who engages the *gunas* in their respective functions—over the whole world rules the One."¹⁴⁸

"Watching over all works, dwelling in all things."¹⁴⁹

"The one who, Himself without colour (differentiation), by the manifold application of His power produces [at the time of creation] many colours according to His hidden purpose, and in whom the whole universe, during its continuance, subsists, and in the end dissolves—He is the Lord. May He endow us with right intellect."¹⁵⁰

Under the supervision of the Lord good and evil produce their respective results. "The Lord alone is the bringer of good and the destroyer of evil."¹⁵¹ The *Kaushitaki Upanishad* says, as we have seen, that if the Lord wishes to lead a man up from these worlds, He makes him do a good deed, and that if the Lord wishes to lead him down from these worlds, He makes him do a bad deed.¹⁵² This is not to be confused with the doctrine of predestination. The text only means that no action, good or bad, is possible without the power of the Lord. Brahman is like a light: with the help of it a good man performs righteous action, an evil man the reverse, but the light is impartial, though without it no action can be performed. Man reaps the result of his own action. He chooses a good or an evil action according to his inner tendencies created by his past works.

Brahman is described as the "Refuge of love" (*Sanjatvāma*): all love goes toward Him. He is also called the "Lord of brightness, for He shines in all worlds."¹⁵³

THE IMMANENT AND THE TRANSCENDENT BRAHMAN

It has already been stated that Brahman, without any external compulsion, assumes the *upādhi* of *māyā* and appears as the universe

¹⁴⁷ *Is. Up.* 8.

¹⁴⁸ *Śvet. Up.* V. 5.

¹⁴⁹ *Śvet. Up.* VI. 11.

¹⁵⁰ *Śvet. Up.* IV. 1.

¹⁵¹ *Śvet. Up.* VI. 6.

¹⁵² III. 8.

¹⁵³ *Chh. Up.* IV. xv. 2, 4.

and its Creator. Thus He becomes immanent in the universe, from the relative standpoint, even though from the standpoint of Pure Consciousness the universe of names and forms does not exist. The Upanishads contain descriptions of both these aspects of Brahman.

The Immanent Brahman dwells in the universe and is to be sought therein. "He wished: May I be many, may I grow forth. Accordingly He practised austerity in the form of intense meditation. After He had thus practised austerity, He created all—whatever there is. Having created it, He entered into it."¹⁵⁴ "In the beginning, Prajāpati (the Creator) stood alone. He had no happiness when alone. Through meditation He brought into existence many creatures. He looked on them and saw they were without understanding, like a lifeless post, like a stone. He had no happiness. He thought: 'I shall enter within, that they may awake.' Making Himself like air, He entered within."¹⁵⁵

The Bhagavad Gītā says that the Lord uses His lower nature to project material forms, and then through His higher nature enters into them and animates them. We read in the Upanishad that, having entered the world, He becomes covered by it like a spider by its web. "May that non-dual God, who spontaneously covers Himself, like a spider, with the web produced from His prakṛiti, grant us entrance into Brahman!"¹⁵⁶ The Lord has saturated the universe through and through. "This Self has entered into these bodies up to the tips of the fingernails—as a razor may be put in its case, or as fire, which sustains the world, is contained in its source (firewood)."¹⁵⁷ He is lost, as it were, in the universe, as when "a lump of salt, dropped into water, dissolves in the water, so that no one is able to grasp it."¹⁵⁸ But just as where-soever one tastes the water, it tastes salt, so also Brahman is to be felt everywhere in the universe as life and consciousness. The *Īśa Upanishad* begins with the exhortation that the whole universe "should be covered with the Lord."

The Upanishadic passages describing the Immanent Brahman show a pantheistic trend of thought. Brahman has become the universe, like milk transformed into curds, or clouds into rainwater. But does Brahman exhaust Himself in the universe? The texts contain passages supporting realism, theism, and pantheism, according to the different

¹⁵⁴ *Tat. Up.* II. 6.

¹⁵⁵ *Mat. Up.* II. 6.

¹⁵⁶ *Śvet. Up.* VI. 10.

¹⁵⁷ *Br. Up.* I. iv. 7.

¹⁵⁸ *Br. Up.* II. iv. 12.

stages of an aspirant's understanding; but the fundamental thought that runs through the whole body of the Upanishads is the *sole reality* of Brahman, or Ātman. Even when the reality of the universe is conceded, the purpose of stressing this reality is to maintain that the manifold world is not different from Brahman. But the reality of the dual universe, independent of Brahman, is denied when it is reiterated that with the Knowledge of Brahman everything is known. What the wise see as the non-dual Reality, the unilluminated, on account of māyā, see as the manifold universe. Therefore, though perceived to be immanent, Brahman remains transcendent. "It is inside all this and It is outside all this."¹⁵⁹ "He moves about, having entered all beings; He has become the Lord of all beings. He is the Self within and without; yea, within and without."¹⁶⁰ The Rig-Veda states that Brahman covers the whole universe and yet transcends it by the measure of "ten fingers." The same idea is expressed in the Upanishads as well.¹⁶¹ In the Bhagavad Gītā the Lord declares that He sustains this universe with only a fraction of Himself.

The *Katha Upanishad* very clearly describes both the immanent and the transcendent aspect of Brahman:

"As the same non-dual fire, after it has entered the world, becomes different according to whatever it burns, so also the same non-dual Ātman, dwelling in all beings, becomes different according to whatever It enters. And It exists also without.

"As the same non-dual air, after it has entered the world, becomes different according to whatever it enters, so also the same non-dual Ātman, dwelling in all beings, becomes different according to whatever It enters. And It exists also without.

"As the sun, which helps all eyes to see, is not affected by the blemishes of the eyes or of the external things revealed by it, so also the one Ātman, dwelling in all beings, is never contaminated by the misery of the world, being outside it."¹⁶²

The universe, like a mirage, is falsely superimposed on Brahman through māyā. Brahman, a homogeneous mass of Consciousness (*chaitanyaghana*), is partless, yet is described as endowed with parts, as it were, for the comprehension of beginners. Thus, though immanent in the universe, Brahman remains, in essence, transcendent. To Him this

¹⁵⁹ *Īś. Up.* 5.

¹⁶⁰ *Mat. Up.* V. 2.

¹⁶¹ *Chh. Up.* III. xii. 6; *Mat. Up.* VII. 11.

¹⁶² *Ka. Up.* II. ii. 9-11.

vast universe is but a little thing. One beam of His light illumines it. A fraction of His power creates, preserves, and destroys it. The manifestation and non-manifestation of the universe proceed from Him without any effort whatsoever on His part—like a man's breathing out and breathing in. "They are like the breath of this [Supreme Self]."¹⁶³

BRAHMAN: CREATOR, PRESERVER, AND DESTROYER OF THE UNIVERSE

The very definition of Brahman (Saguna Brahman is understood) in the *Vedānta Sūtras* is, as we have stated: *Janmādasya yatah (janmā-ādi-asya yatah)*—"Whence is the origin, continuance, and dissolution of the universe." The *Taittiriya Upanishad* puts it this way: "That whence these beings are born, That by which, when born, they live, That into which at death they enter—try to know That. That is Brahman."¹⁶⁴ The *Chhāndogya Upanishad* reveals "Tajjalān" as a secret name of Brahman by which He should be worshipped.¹⁶⁵ The meaning of the formula is this: From this (*ta*) Brahman the universe has arisen (*ja*). So, on the reverse path to that by which it has arisen, it disappears (*li*) into this identical Brahman. And in the same way, finally, it is Brahman in whom the universe, after it is created, breathes (*an*), lives, and moves. Therefore in the three periods (past, present, and future) the universe is not distinct from Brahman. The formula succinctly summarizes the principal attributes of Brahman as Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the universe. In the same Upanishad¹⁶⁶ the teacher, wishing to explain the root of the universe, asks the pupil to bring a fruit of the banyan tree.

"Here is one, sir."

"Break it."

"It is broken, sir."

"What do you see there?"

"The seeds, almost infinitesimal."

"Break one of them."

"It is broken, sir."

"What do you see there?"

"Not anything, sir."

The teacher then gives the instruction: "My son, that subtle essence

¹⁶³ *Br. Up.* II. iv. 10.

¹⁶⁴ *Tai. Up.* III. 1.

¹⁶⁵ *Chh. Up.* III. xiv. 1.

¹⁶⁶ *Chh. Up.* VI. xii.

which you do not perceive there—in that very essence this great banyan exists. Believe it, my son. That which is the subtle essence—in It all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self. And thou, O Śvetaketu, art It."

The *Katha Upanishad* describes the universe as the eternal *Āsvattha* tree, rooted in Brahman, with its shoots spreading downward.¹⁶⁷

Brahman alone, as the inmost essence of things, preserves them all. "He is the sun dwelling in the bright heavens. He is the air dwelling in the interspace. He is the fire dwelling on earth. He is the guest dwelling in the house. He dwells in men, in the gods, in truth, in the sky. He is born in the water, on earth, in the sacrifice, on the mountains. He is the True and the Great."¹⁶⁸ "He, indeed, is the Deva who pervades all regions: He is the first-born [as Hiraṇyagarbha] and He is the womb. He has been born and He will be born. He stands behind all persons, looking everywhere. The God who is in fire, the God who is in water, the God who has entered into the whole world, the God who is in plants, the God who is in trees—adoration be to that God, adoration!"¹⁶⁹ We have seen that Brahman is described in the *Bṛihad-āranyaka Upanishad* as a *setu*, which means both bridge and dike. As bridge He connects one being with another and the present world with the future world; as dike He keeps asunder these worlds to prevent their clashing together. On account of Him there is no confusion in the world of diversity. Everything moves along its allotted path.

Brahman is the womb into which the universe again returns. Hence He is called the Destroyer. The Vedāntists have formulated a doctrine of cycles, by which is described the unceasing process of creation and destruction, or, more precisely, manifestation and non-manifestation. The actions of one's present life find their recompense in the next life. Again, the present life is the result of the preceding one. Therefore each existence presupposes an earlier one and consequently no existence can be the first. The rebirth of the soul (*jīva*) has been going on from all eternity; and so *samsāra*, or the relative universe, is without beginning. Indeed, it is absurd to speak of the beginning of a causal chain. When the Upanishads speak of a beginning or creation, they mean, really, the beginning of the present cycle. From all eternity, the universe has been going periodically into a state of non-manifestation

¹⁶⁷ *Ka. Up.* II. iii. 1.

¹⁶⁸ *Ka. Up.* II. ii. 2.

¹⁶⁹ *Śvet. Up.* II. 16-17.

and then again returning into the manifest state of names and forms. At the conclusion of each cycle the universe and all those living beings that have not been liberated from *māyā* return to Brahman, that is to say, to His prakṛiti, or primordial nature.

"At the end of a cycle all beings, O Son of Kunti, enter into My prakṛiti, and at the beginning of a cycle I generate them again."¹⁷⁰ The Rig-Veda says: "The Lord creates in this cycle the sun and moon as they existed in the previous cycle." So creation is a never-ending process, following an invariable, monotonous pattern. It has been compared to the breathing out and in of the Cosmic Person, reposing on the Ocean of the Great Cause. "In Him the universe is interwoven—whatever moves or is motionless; in Him everything disappears, like bubbles in the ocean. In Him the living creatures of the universe, emptying themselves, become invisible; they disappear and then come to light again like bubbles rising to the surface." "For there is one Rudra only—they do not allow a second—who rules all the worlds by His powers. He stands behind all persons, and after having created all the worlds, He, the Protector, rolls them all up at the end of time."¹⁷¹

"He, like *ākāśa*, is everywhere, and at the destruction of the universe He alone is awake. From *ākāśa*, again, He rouses all this world."¹⁷² "In Me the universe had its origin, in Me alone the whole subsists, in Me it is lost: this Brahman, the Limitless—It is I Myself."¹⁷³

The individual self liberated from *māyā* merges in Brahman. The self is always Brahman—before its manifestation as the individual soul and also during the state of embodiment. When it knows its true nature, knowingly it becomes Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, again.

THE COSMIC SOUL

Some of the oft-repeated epithets of Saguna Brahman in the Upanishads are *Brahmā*, *Hiranyagarbha*, *Virāt*, *Prāna*, and *Sutrātmā*. They all in a general way denote the World Soul, the Cosmic Soul, the Cosmic Mind, or the Cosmic Person. According to later Vedāntists, when the Absolute, or Pure Consciousness, becomes conditioned by the upādhi of the gross universe, It is called *Virāt*; when conditioned by that of the subtle universe, It is called *Hiranyagarbha*; and when

conditioned by that of the causal universe, It is called *Prāna* or *Sutrātmā*. In the writings of Vedāntists, however, these terms are often interchanged. *Hiranyagarbha*, or *Brahmā*, is mentioned in the Rig-Veda as the first-born when Brahman becomes conditioned by *māyā*. He is the first entity endowed with the consciousness of individuality. "Who creates the God *Brahmā* in the beginning and who communicates to Him the Vedas also."¹⁷⁴ He is called *Brahmā* (masculine) and is differentiated from Brahman (neuter). He is the "Golden Egg," containing in potential form the future manifold universe. In contrast with the *jiva*, the individualized consciousness, who is conscious only of his own soul, *Brahmā* is conscious of all souls. The totality of all beings is His individuality (*sarvābhimāni*).

It is implicit in the Upanishadic teachings that the entire objective universe is possible only in so far as it is sustained by a knowing subject. Though this knowing subject is manifested in all individual subjects, yet it is not, by any means, identified with them. Individual subjects come into existence and die, but the universe continues to exist. Who, then, is its perceiver or knower? It is *Brahmā*, or *Hiranyagarbha*, who is the eternal Knowing Subject by which the universe is sustained. All living beings respond in more or less like manner to the outside world, and experience the same sensations, because their individual minds are controlled by the cosmic mind of *Brahmā*, and also because they are part and parcel of Him. When, at the end of a cycle, *Brahmā* dies, the universe dies with Him. Though identified with all minds and the entire universe, *Brahmā* is also described as the presiding deity or governor of a special plane, or heaven, known as *Brahmaloka*, the Plane of *Brahmā*. This is the most exalted realm in the relative universe and may be compared, in a general way, to the heaven of the dualistic religions. Those fortunate mortals who, while living on earth, worship Saguna Brahman with whole-souled devotion, meditating on their identity with Him, proceed after death to *Brahmaloka*, where they dwell absorbed in contemplation of Saguna Brahman. There they experience uninterrupted peace and blessedness and take part in the cosmic life of *Brahmā*. They are not affected by any of the shortcomings of the other relative planes, such as disease, pain, thirst, or hunger. These inhabitants of *Brahmaloka* do not come back to earth, but at the end of the cycle become absorbed, together with *Brahmā*, in the attributeless Brahman and thus attain final Liberation. This is described

¹⁷⁴ *Śvet. Up.* VI. 18.

¹⁷⁰ *B. G.* IX. 7.

¹⁷¹ *Śvet. Up.* III. 2.

¹⁷² *Mat. Up.* VI. 17.

¹⁷³ *Kai. Up.* 19.

as kramamukti, or Liberation attained by stages. There is another class of devotees who also attain to Brahmaloaka after death but come back to earth for a new embodiment after reaping the results of their meritorious actions. They are those who have performed one hundred Horse-sacrifices and also those who have lived, according to the scriptural injunctions, the life of a brahmachāri until their death.

The path to Brahmaloaka lies through what has been described in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gitā (VIII. 24.) as the Devayāna, or Way of the Gods, which is characterized by various luminous stages, such as flame, day, the bright fortnight of the moon, the bright half of the year (when the sun travels northward), the sun, and lightning. It is also called the Northern Path. There is another path, called the Pitriyāna, the Way of the Fathers, or the Southern Path, which leads to Chandraloaka, the Plane of the Moon. To it go, after death, those householders who have performed their daily obligatory duties and worshipped the gods, following the scriptural rules, with a view to enjoying the results of their meritorious actions in this lower heaven. The path leading to Chandraloaka is characterized by dark stages, such as smoke and not flame, night and not day, the dark fortnight of the moon and not the bright, and the months of winter and not of summer. After enjoying the results of their meritorious actions in this lower heaven, souls come back to earth and are born as ordinary mortals. What happens to those who have attained complete Self-Knowledge while living here on earth, and also to those who have committed very vile actions, will be discussed later.¹⁷⁵

Brahman's universal form, known as Virāt, has been described in sublime language in the Hindu scriptures. "Whence the sun rises and whither it goes to set, in whom all the devas are contained, and whom none can ever pass beyond."¹⁷⁶ "From whom all works, all desires, all odours and tastes, proceed—He who embraces all this, who never speaks and is never surprised."¹⁷⁷ The universe is His body.

A hymn of the Rig-Veda addressed to the Purusha (the Cosmic Person) describes His universal form in the following manner: The Purusha has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, and a thousand feet. He covers the universe on all sides and transcends it "by the measure of ten fingers." All this—the past, the present, and the future—is

¹⁷⁵ See p. 104 and p. 99.

¹⁷⁶ *Ka. Up.* II. i. 9.

¹⁷⁷ *Chh. Up.* III. xiv. 2.

indeed the Purusha; He alone is the Lord of all, mortal and immortal. "Its hands and feet are everywhere; Its eyes and head are everywhere; Its ears are everywhere; It stands encompassing all in the world."¹⁷⁸ "The heavens are His head; the sun and moon, His eyes; the quarters, His ears; the revealed Vedas, His speech; the wind is His breath; the universe, His heart. From His feet is produced the earth. He is, indeed, the Inner Self of all beings."¹⁷⁹ This universal form comprises not only our earth and the galactic system to which it belongs, but all the fourteen worlds of Hindu mythology—the seven above and the seven below—and all the animate and inanimate creatures dwelling therein, including gods and angels, men and animals, birds and insects, trees, plants, shrubs, and creepers. This totality is the Lord's universal form.

THE GREAT LORD (MAHEŚVARA)

The Upanishads sometimes describe Saguna Brahman as the "highest Supreme Lord of Lords, the Highest Deity of Deities, the Master of Masters."¹⁸⁰ "He has duly allotted to the eternal World-Creators their respective duties."¹⁸¹ Who are these "eternal World-Creators"? The Upanishads certainly do not believe in many Gods or Ultimate Realities. Brahman is one and without a second. "To whom there is nothing superior, from whom there is nothing different, than whom there is nothing smaller or larger, who stands alone."¹⁸² "Beyond the Purusha there is nothing: this is the end, the Supreme Goal."¹⁸³ Who, then, are these numerous Lords, and what is their relationship to the Supreme Lord? The answers to these questions have been elaborated in the Purānas but already indicated in the Upanishads. Let us try to understand the subject by the analogy of modern astronomy.

The Brahmānda, or Egg of Brahmā, described by the Hindu seers, may be likened, without pressing the comparison too far, to the solar system. The name is derived from its shape, which is oval, like an egg, or, more precisely, elliptical. There are, according to the rishis, innumerable Brahmāndas, which constantly appear and disappear in the Ocean of the Great Cause (Mahākāraṇa).

¹⁷⁸ *Śvet. Up.* III. 16.

¹⁷⁹ *Mu. Up.* II. i. 4.

¹⁸⁰ *Śvet. Up.* VI. 7.

¹⁸¹ *Is. Up.* 8.

¹⁸² *Śvet. Up.* III. 9.

¹⁸³ *Ka. Up.* I. iii. 11.

The planets and their satellites, which revolve with the sun as their centre, constitute our solar system. The earth, which is a tiny speck in comparison with the sun, is one of the planets. The moon is a satellite of the earth. Other planets also have their satellites. These satellites move along their orbits with the planet as their centre; and the planets move with the sun as their centre. The ellipse which determines the boundary of the solar system may be called the sun's circumference.

Countless stars shine in the firmament of the night, and yet only a few of all that exist come within the ken even of the most powerful telescope. It takes many, many years for the light of a star—travelling at the rate of one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles per second—to reach the earth. It is said that the light of some stars has not yet reached us. Each is a sun—most of them many times larger than our own sun. Probably many are the centres of their own solar systems, having their own planets and satellites. No one can count, or even estimate, the number of solar systems in the creation.

The earth supports life in various forms, and there is no reason to suppose that such life exists only here. The Hindu seers state that life is to be found—it may be in different forms—in other solar systems also; but such knowledge, of course, is beyond the verification of physical science as it is known to us at the present time.

The Brahmānda (Cosmic Egg) of the Purānas may be likened to a single solar system. Each Brahmānda has its own Lord, its Governor or Controller, who, needless to say, is a manifestation, in māyā, of Brahman, or the Absolute. This Lord, or Ívara, has three aspects: as Brahmā He creates, as Vishnu He preserves, and as Śiva He destroys. These three form one Lord, or God, who is known by three different names according to His three functions. Since the Brahmāndas are without number, so too are the Brahmās, Vishnus, and Śivas without number. The Purāna says: "One may be able to count the number of sands on the seashore, but one cannot count the number of the Brahmāndas or the deities controlling them."

He who is the Lord of these countless deities is Maheśvara, or the Supreme Lord—Saguna Brahman. Brahmās, Vishnus, and Śivas are innumerable, but Maheśvara is one and without a second. Each Ívara is the Lord of one Brahmānda alone; but Maheśvara is the Lord of all Ívaras and also of the millions of Brahmāndas. "Endowed with infinite power, Brahman is the Lord of Lords." He is the Emperor, and

the Ívaras are kings, more or less autonomous in their respective realms. Further, under each of the Ívaras are many subsidiary deities performing various duties in the Brahmānda.

Thus there are innumerable Brahmāndas in the creation, each with its independent ruling Lord, and under Him, in each universe, many subsidiary deities. And at the head of all is Maheśvara, the King of Kings. Maheśvara is sometimes called the Eternal Lord (Nitya Ívara); and Ívara, sometimes, the Created Lord (Janya Ívara). The latter is known also by the general name of Brahmā, whereas the former is Saguna Brahman. Brahmā is the first created being in the relative universe. "Brahmā, the Maker of the universe and the Preserver of the world, was the first among the devas."¹⁸⁴ "He who first creates Brahmā and delivers the Vedas to Him."¹⁸⁵ "The first-born, the offspring of austerity."¹⁸⁶ "Brahmā revealed the knowledge of the Vedas to Hiranyagarbha, Hiranyagarbha to Manu, and Manu to his offspring."¹⁸⁷

Rudimentary matter, the first stage in the manifestation of the relative universe, was evolved from Saguna Brahman Himself. This matter is sometimes called the "primeval waters" (ap), the unmanifested prakṛiti. Brahman "saw Hiranyagarbha arise" from these waters.¹⁸⁸

As we have noted above, the sun is the centre of a solar system, or Brahmānda. The Lord of the Brahmānda is described as dwelling in the sun. The Upanishads often describe Him as the "Person in the sun." "The Person that is seen in the sun—I am He, I am He indeed."¹⁸⁹ "O Nourisher, lone traveller of the sky! Controller! O Sun, Offspring of Prajāpati! Gather Your rays; withdraw Your light. I would see, through Your grace, that form of Yours which is the fairest. I am, indeed He, that Purusha, who dwells there."¹⁹⁰ This Person in the sun is sometimes called Vishnu, because He pervades all—the entire solar system. Here is a further description of the Deity: "Now that Person, bright as gold, who is seen within the sun, with golden beard

¹⁸⁴ *Mu. Up.* I. i. 1.

¹⁸⁵ *Ścet. Up.* VI. 18.

¹⁸⁶ *Ka. Up.* II. i. 6.

¹⁸⁷ *Chh. Up.* III. xi. 4.

¹⁸⁸ Brahmā is created from prakṛiti; He is not eternal. The Supreme Brahman alone is eternal.

¹⁸⁹ *Chh. Up.* IV. xi. 1.

¹⁹⁰ *Ís. Up.* 16.

and golden hair—golden altogether to the very tips of His nails . . ."¹⁹¹

Who is this Person dwelling in the sun; and why is the solar deity called a person? Śankarāchārya, in his commentary on the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*,¹⁹² states that He, Prajāpati, is like a person, being endowed with a head, hands, and other parts. He was the first to be created. The Prajāpati of the present cycle had practised meditation in a previous cycle and performed Vedic rites, with a view to occupying the position of the Lord in the next cycle. Others, too, had done the same, but among them all, He was the first to be freed from such obstacles as gross ignorance and attachment. What this means is this: that in the previous cycle many aspirants practised spiritual disciplines but did not attain complete Liberation because they still possessed traces of desire and attachment. Of these, the most advanced was reborn in the present cycle, as the Prajāpati of the Brahmānda, in which capacity He now enjoys great power and bliss. But this position of Brahmā must not be confused with the attainment of the Highest Good, or Liberation; for even He is said to be afflicted by fear and unhappiness. His life is impermanent, lasting for the duration of a Brahmānda. His position, though an exalted one, still belongs to the relative world. Only the courageous aspirant who can renounce the position of Brahmā, which is non-eternal, can attain the Highest Good.

To give a brief outline of this interpretation of the creation: In the beginning—that is to say, before the evolution of names and forms, time and space—Ātman, or Brahman, alone exists. Then It becomes conditioned by māyā, Its own inscrutable power. At that time Brahman is called Saguna Brahman—Maheśvara, or the Great Lord. The idea of creation arises in His mind. *Sa aikshata*—"He thought." Then Brahman, on account of māyā, forgets, as it were, Its infinite nature and regards Itself as an individual entity. It says: "I am one; I shall be many."

Three "moments" are to be distinguished in creation: First, the Supreme Brahman accepts the limitation of māyā and becomes Maheśvara. Second, the desire for creation arises in His mind. Third, He feels His loneliness and decides to multiply Himself. Then, with the help of māyā, He creates ākāśa, air, and the other elements.

Maheśvara, who is the Ruler of all the Brahmāndas, is thus the First Person in the creation. Hiranyagarbha, or Brahmā, who as a

¹⁹¹ *Chh. Up.* I. vi. 6.

¹⁹² I. iv. 1.

result of spiritual disciplines practised in a previous cycle, becomes the Ruler of a Brahmānda, is the Second Person. Though possessed of an individuality, He identifies Himself with the whole universe; He is described in the Vedas as endowed with innumerable heads, innumerable eyes, and innumerable feet. And the Godhead dwelling in every heart is the Third Person. He is Antaryāmin, or the Inner Guide.

MICROCOSM AND MACROCOSM

One of the most significant symbols of Brahman, both Personal and Impersonal, is Aum, pronounced and often written Om.¹⁹³ "The goal which all the Vedas declare, which all austerities aim at, and which men desire when they lead the life of continence, I will tell you briefly: it is Om. This syllable Om is indeed Brahman. This syllable is the Highest. Whoso knows this syllable obtains whatever he desires. This is the best support; this is the highest support. Whoso knows this support is adored in the world of Brahmā."¹⁹⁴ The *Māndukya Upanishad* discusses Brahman through Om. "Om, the syllable, is all this."¹⁹⁵ Patanjali states in the *Yoga Sūtras*:¹⁹⁶ "Om is the signifying word of Īśvara."

The word as written in Sanskrit consists of three letters: A, U, and M. These are called the three quarters, or letters, of Om. There is a fourth quarter, denoted by the prolonged undifferentiated sound M, which comes at the end, as the word is pronounced. This is the symbol of Nirguna Brahman, or Pure Consciousness. "That which is partless, incomprehensible, non-dual, all bliss, and which brings about the cessation of the phenomenal world, is Om, the Fourth, and verily the same as Ātman. He who knows this merges his self in the Self."¹⁹⁷ The first three quarters, or letters, of Om apply to the relative universe. A, called Vaiśvānara, is the first quarter; it functions in the waking state. U, called Taijasa, is the second quarter; it functions in the dream state. And M, called Prājna, is the third quarter; it functions in the state of dreamless sleep. Vaiśvānara is the experiencer of the gross, Taijasa of the subtle, and Prājna of the causal.¹⁹⁸ The fourth

¹⁹³ To be pronounced as in *home*.

¹⁹⁴ *Ka. Up.* I. ii. 15-17.

¹⁹⁵ *Mā. Up.* I.

¹⁹⁶ I. 27.

¹⁹⁷ *Mā. Up.* 12.

¹⁹⁸ See *Mā. Up.* VI; also *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā.* I. 1.

quarter—which in reality is indescribable in terms of relations, but is called the fourth only with reference to the other three—is Turiya, or Pure Consciousness, which permeates all the states and is also transcendent.

Let us now try to develop the meaning of what has been outlined in the two preceding paragraphs. All our relative experiences are included in the waking state, the dream state, and the state of deep sleep. In the waking state we experience, through the gross body and the sense-organs, the gross world. In dreams we experience subtle objects through mind, or the subtle body. The causal world we experience in dreamless sleep, when the mind and the sense-organs do not function. Yogins, even in the waking state, can experience the subtle and causal worlds, which have objective reality. One must use the gross body to experience the gross world, the subtle body to experience the subtle world, and the causal body to experience the causal world. Therefore, corresponding to the three worlds—the gross, the subtle, and the causal—there are three states, namely, waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, and also three bodies, namely, the gross, the subtle, and the causal. But it must not be forgotten that Consciousness is Ātman, which is always present in the three states and forms their substratum. When Ātman uses the gross body for the experience of the gross world, It is given the technical name of Viśva. When It uses the subtle body for the experience of the subtle world, It is called Taijasa. And when the same Ātman uses the causal body for the experience of the causal world, It is called Prājna. Ātman is one and without a second. It is Pure Brahman. It is bodiless. When associated with the three upādhis It is given three different names. Free from any upādhi, It is Brahman, the Absolute.

The above is a description of the microcosm, or individual soul. The same is true of the macrocosm, or totality of souls.

"This Ātman is Brahman."¹⁹⁹ As in the case of the individual soul, Brahman also functions in the relative universe in the three states, in association with three upādhis, and is known by three technical names. With reference to the gross upādhi, Brahman is called Virāt; with reference to the subtle upādhi, Hiranyagarbha or Prajāpati; and with reference to the causal upādhi, Sutrātmā or Prāna. But, as has already been stated, all these terms are often interchanged in the earlier Vedānta books.

¹⁹⁹ *Mā. Up.* 2.

There is no intrinsic difference between the microcosm and the macrocosm. A forest (macrocosm) is nothing but an aggregate of individual trees (microcosm). A lake (macrocosm) is an aggregate of small portions of water (microcosm). But both microcosm and macrocosm possess their own distinctive individuality. The macrocosm, though an aggregate of individual units, is not a mere abstraction. This can be better explained by the illustration of cells. A living body consists of innumerable cells, each of which possesses a distinctive individuality. The totality of cells, the body, has however its own independent individuality. Each cell has a distinct life and purpose of its own. It lives by extracting from its immediate environment what is necessary for its growth and nutrition. But this work has, for its end, the ultimate nutrition and building-up of the whole body, of which each individual cell forms a very small, but necessary, distinct unit.

A gross living body consists of the aggregate of its living cells. Likewise, the aggregate of all gross individual bodies constitutes Virāt; the aggregate of all individual subtle bodies, Hiranyagarbha; and the aggregate of all causal bodies, Sutrātmā, or Prāna. The gross upādhi consists of the totality of gross bodies; in other words, the instrument through which Brahman functions in the gross world is the totality of the gross bodies. The subtle upādhi consists of the totality of subtle bodies; in the subtle world Brahman's instrument is the totality of subtle bodies, or minds. The causal upādhi consists of the totality of causal bodies; when Brahman functions in the causal world, It uses the totality of causal bodies as Its instrument.

The subtle and causal bodies may also refer to advanced souls in different states of perfection. They are the media through which the higher attributes of the Lord, such as knowledge, power, love, purity, and compassion, find expression in the universe. The Lord may be likened to the centre, the very heart, of the universe, and the great souls, to the arteries that meet there. By them the life-blood is carried to all parts of the universe.

It has been stated before that the Lord, when associated with the upādhi of the causal bodies, is called Sutrātmā. The word means, literally, the "Thread Soul"—that is to say, the thread-like, subtle substance that joins together all the different individuals—men, gods, animals, and inorganic beings. It is like the protoplasmic substance which, by its minute threads, passing through the cell-walls, unites the

cells in a living organism. "It is He who pervades all."²⁰⁰ "By Me, in My unmanifested form, are all things in this universe pervaded."²⁰¹

All that has been stated above applies also in the case of Maheśvara, the Great Lord. He represents the totality of all Brahmās. These Brahmās sometimes are compared to mere bubbles that appear and disappear in the Ocean of the Great Cause. Each one of them is born, lives for a while, and ultimately dies. Even when one Brahmā with his Brahmaloка disappears, others continue to exist and function. The merging of one Brahmā into Maheśvara after his life-span is completed is called a partial dissolution (khandapralaya). The merging of all Brahmās, after uncountable ages, into Maheśvara, is called a great dissolution (mahāpralaya). Each destruction, partial or complete, is followed by a new creation. The systole and diastole of the cosmic heart never stops.

The Upanishads often say that only when a man feels dispassion for all forms of life, from the blade of grass to Brahmā, is he qualified to be a seeker of Liberation. From the standpoint of the Absolute, all manifestations are impermanent and transitory. Brahman alone is the immutable Witness of the births and deaths in the creation. And that Brahman dwells in each man's heart as his inmost Soul.

SYNTHESIS

We have already spoken of the two aspects of Brahman: Nirguna and Saguna. Nirguna Brahman is characterized by an absence of all attributes. It is Pure Consciousness and the immutable foundation of the universe. Again, in association with māyā, Brahman appears as Saguna Brahman, which, from the standpoint of the Absolute, is mutable and impermanent. The knowledge of the former is called the Higher Knowledge, and that of the latter, the lower knowledge. The Higher Knowledge brings about immediate Liberation, resulting in the utter cessation of all suffering and the attainment of supreme Bliss. The lower knowledge leads to the realization of the position of Brahmā and thus paves the way for ultimate Liberation. It offers the highest happiness in the material world. But still it is not Immortality. The attainment of the Higher Knowledge, or Parā Vidyā, is the goal of the spiritual life. But the lower knowledge, or aparā vidyā, is not to be neglected or despised. As long as a man is conscious of the ego and

²⁰⁰ *Is. Up.* 8.

²⁰¹ *B. G. IX.* 4.

the outside world, and as long as he takes these to be real, so long must he cultivate this knowledge. The Bhagavad Gitā says that if a man who is identified with the body follows the way of the Unmanifest, he only courts misery. The *Mundaka Upanishad* exhorts the pupil to cultivate both the Higher Knowledge and the lower knowledge. "The fetters of the heart are broken, all doubts are resolved, and all works cease to bear fruit, when He is beheld who is both high and low."²⁰²

As we have seen above, Brahman, in association with māyā, becomes Maheśvara. His glories have been described in the Upanishads. He is the Ruler of all, the Controller of all, and the Inner Guide of all beings. The sun, moon, and stars obey His commands. Under His wise providence the seasons and years follow each other in orderly succession. He is the thunderbolt, ready to be hurled at transgressors of His laws—"He to whom brāhmins and kshattriyas are mere food, and death itself a condiment."²⁰³ He covers the universe and also extends beyond.

This universal aspect of the Lord has been described in most vivid language in the eleventh chapter of the Bhagavad Gitā in Arjuna's hymn to Sri Krishna:

"I behold Thee with myriads of arms and bellies, with myriads of faces and eyes. I behold Thee, infinite in form, on every side, but I see not Thy end nor Thy middle nor Thy beginning, O Lord of the universe, O Universal Form! . . . Into Thee enter these hosts of gods, and some in fear extol Thee with folded hands. And bands of rishis and siddhas exclaim: 'May there be peace!' and praise Thee with splendid hymns." The Lord describes Himself in the Gitā as "mighty, world-destroying Time." This Form embodies the vast extent of creation, preservation, and destruction; past, present, and future; gods, men, animals, and inorganic things. One blest with the exalted vision beholds all this simultaneously and in one instant. Naturally mortal eyes become dazed with the manifestation of so much glory, power, and splendour. Arjuna, terrified by the spectacle, obtained peace of mind only when the Lord withdrew His effulgence and appeared before him again as the Personal God whom he had always loved and cherished in his heart.

There is another aspect of Saguna Brahman, which is tender, gentle,

²⁰² *Mu. Up.* II. ii. 8.

²⁰³ *Ka. Up.* I. ii. 25.

and redemptive. "He is Bliss."²⁰⁴ The *Chhândogya Upanishad* describes Him as the "Refuge of love" and the "Lord of love." "O Rudra, let Thy gracious face protect me for ever."²⁰⁵ "The Lord, the Giver of blessings, the Adorable God—by revering Him one attains eternal peace."²⁰⁶ The seers of the Upanishads addressed Him as their Father and prayed to Him to lead them to the other side of *mâyâ*. The various forms which Saguna Brahman assumes for the welfare of the devotees have been known and worshipped all over the world—as the Father in Heaven, Allâh the great, Jehovah the just, Vishnu, Śiva, and Brahmā—emphasizing the different aspects of the Great Lord Mahésvara.

A more tender and human manifestation of the Great Lord is seen in His Incarnations, the Avatāras. The *Bhagavad Gitā* says that whenever virtue declines and vice prevails, the Godhead, with the help of *mâyâ*, takes a human form for the protection of the virtuous and the chastisement of the wicked. Men naturally understand God better when He appears to them in a human form. They can then establish with Him a sweet, human relationship. They can regard Him as Father, Mother, Friend, or Beloved and pour out their heart's love for Him. This intense love of God consumes the dross of lust, greed, passion, anger, pride, selfishness, and other impurities of the devotee's mind and enables it to acquire one-pointedness. The mind thus purified can then comprehend the Absolute.

As already stated, Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman are not fundamentally different entities. It is *mâyâ* that makes the difference, as a stick laid across water seems to divide it. Śri Ramakrishna compared Nirguna Brahman to the infinite ocean, and Saguna Brahman to blocks of ice. Intense cold freezes the water of the ocean into solid ice; again, the blazing heat of the sun melts the ice into water. Likewise, on account of the intense love of the aspirant, Brahman, with the help of *mâyâ*, embodies Itself and becomes God with form; again, the discrimination and knowledge of the aspirant, like the heat of the sun, melt the form into the indefinable Absolute. When a bird—to use another illustration of Śri Ramakrishna's—gets tired by continuously flying in the sky, it seeks a tree to rest its weary wings. Likewise, a seer of Truth, when not in communion with Pure Brahman, enjoys

²⁰⁴ *Tat. Up.* II. 7.

²⁰⁵ *Śvet. Up.* IV. 21.

²⁰⁶ *Śvet. Up.* IV. 11.

the embodied forms of the Godhead. The *Bhāgavatam* says: "Even the sages who are delighted with the realization of their inmost Self, and who have cut all the bonds of the world, show for Hari²⁰⁷ love which is utterly free from motives—such is His wonderful glory."

Mâyâ exercises its bewitching power upon the unillumined; but the sages, whose minds are enlightened by the Knowledge of Brahman, see in the relative universe, created by *mâyâ*, the manifestation of Brahman. To them everything—even *mâyâ*—is Brahman. They do not deny the forms of God and the creation. Whether contemplating the Absolute or participating in the relative, they see Brahman alone everywhere—in the undifferentiated Absolute as well as in names and forms. *Mâyâ* cannot delude them. Śri Ramakrishna used to say that to accept names and forms divorced from the reality of Brahman is *ajnāna*, ignorance; to see Brahman alone, and deny the world, is philosophical knowledge, *jnāna*; but to see Brahman everywhere, in names and forms, in good and evil, pain and pleasure, life and death, as well as in the depths of meditation, is *vijnāna*, a supremely rich knowledge. Endowed with *vijnāna*, blessed souls commune with Brahman in meditation and devote themselves, when not meditating, to the service of the world.

METHODS OF INSTRUCTION: SYMBOLS

The seventh chapter of the *Chhândogya Upanishad* narrates the story of Sanatkumāra instructing Nārada in the Knowledge of Brahman. The pupil had studied the different branches of the lower knowledge, such as the Vedic rituals, the Purānas, grammar, ethics, and the other sciences; but with all that, he knew that he could not overcome grief. He therefore asked the teacher for that knowledge which would carry him beyond grief. Sanatkumāra told Nārada that all he had studied was only a name. He taught Nārada about Brahman through such symbols as *vāk* (speech), *manas* (mind), *sankalpa* (desire), *chittam* (mind-stuff), and *dhyānam* (meditation). Through these Nārada was instructed finally in *Bhumā*, the Infinite, beyond which there is nothing, which comprehends all, fills all space, and yet is identical with *Ātman*.

The Upanishads abound in symbolic representations of Brahman and *Ātman*. What is the meaning of a symbol? It is a visible sign of an invisible entity. The Sanskrit words generally used for "symbol" are *pratika* and *pratimā*. Some of the important symbols of Brahman

²⁰⁷ An epithet of the Personal God.

are *prāna* (the vital breath), *vāyu* (wind), *ākāśa* (space), *manas* (mind), *āditya* (the sun), and *Om*. A *pratimā*, or image, as seen in the popular religions, is also a symbol of the Godhead. Beginners, with their restricted understanding, need a symbol in order to contemplate the Highest. Thus a Cross, an Ark, a Crescent, a statue, a book, fire, and temples have all been used as so many symbols. In the minds of the unworthy a symbol often degenerates into an idol which is worshipped: to worship a symbol as God is idolatry. But to worship God through a symbol is a legitimate means of divine communion. In the one case the Godhead is brought down to the level of a material object; in the other case, the image itself is spiritualized. The Upanishads stress the method of knowledge more than that of formal worship. The Truth is to be realized by hearing about It from a qualified teacher, reasoning about It in one's own mind, and lastly by contemplating It.

Prajāpati taught Indra about *Ātman* by stages.²⁰⁸ He had once declared: "The Self (*Ātman*), which is free from sin, free from old age, from death and grief, from hunger and thirst, which desires nothing but what it ought to desire and imagines nothing but what it ought to imagine—That it is which we must search out, That it is which we must try to understand." Indra, the king of the gods, and *Virochana*, the king of the demons, had approached Prajāpati and asked him about the Knowledge of *Ātman*. He taught them first through the illustration of the reflection one sees by looking into another's eyes, into water, and into a mirror, saying that what they saw there was *Ātman*. Both disciples took the body for the Self and went away satisfied. But Indra, after some contemplation, found limitations inherent in the corporeal self, which therefore could not be "immortal and fearless, free from hunger and thirst, sinless, and free from old age." He asked the teacher for further instruction and was taught that the self which roams about untrammelled in dreams was *Ātman*. In dreams it is free from the limitations of the waking body and yet it remains real and individual. But Indra thought that though the limitations of the waking state might not affect the dream soul, yet it remained bound by corporeal conditions. For instance, in dreams also one "becomes conscious, as it were, of pain and sheds tears." At last Prajāpati said: "When a man, being asleep, relaxed, and at perfect rest, sees no dreams—that is the Self. This is the Immortal, the Fearless; this is Brahman." Indra had thought that the state of deep sleep was surely a state of annihila-

²⁰⁸ *Chh. Up.* VIII. vii-xii.

tion, when a man remains ignorant of himself and the universe. Prajāpati explained, however, the significance of deep sleep, in which the distinction of subject and object ceases to exist. It is nearest to the experience of *Turiya*, or Pure Consciousness, when the Self realizes Itself as the Knowing Subject without any object. This is the true and pristine nature of Consciousness, not resting upon empirical experience or devoted to objects external to Itself.

In the above illustration we see three successive conceptions of *Ātman*. First is the ordinary materialistic view. *Ātman* is the body; it perishes with it. The image seen in water or a mirror is a reflection of the body, complete "to the hair and the nails." When the body is adorned with fine clothes, the reflection also appears to be so adorned. Therefore by protecting the body with food and clothes one protects *Ātman*. Second, *Ātman* is the individual soul, which is always associated with a body but never dependent upon a particular one. In sleep the waking body is replaced by a dream body. According to this view *Ātman* is bound by corporeal conditions through successive births and deaths. Third, *Ātman* is Pure Consciousness, the non-dual and supreme Self, omnipresent and omniscient. It exists independent of empirical experience.

The method followed in the above instruction is called the *Arundhatinyāya*, or way of showing the star *Arundhati*. According to an old Hindu custom, a bride, after her marriage, is asked to look at a tiny star called *Arundhati*, hardly visible to the naked eye. She is first told to fix her gaze on the branch of a tree pointing to the star; next, on a large star close to it; then on a smaller star; and at last, when her eyes are trained, on *Arundhati* itself.

BRAHMAN AS PRĀNA AND VĀYU

Two frequently used symbols of Brahman in the Upanishads are *prāna* and *vāyu*. The word *prāna*, often inadequately translated as "breath," is used in a variety of ways. It denotes the vital organs, the breathing, and also the life principle which animates the vital organs. It is identical with *vāyu*, the wind, which is the vital breath of the universe. Of *vāyu*, the cosmic breath, the breath of the individual is a partial manifestation. As in the case of the fly-shuttle in a textile mill, when the *prāna* begins to work, all the organs work. The body of an organic being lives as long as the *prāna* inhabits it. All the organs are dependent upon the *prāna*. "As bees go out when their queen goes

out, and return when she returns, thus deed, speech, eye, mind, and ear follow the prāna."²⁰⁹ "As the spokes of a wheel hold to the nave, so does all this hold to the prāna."²¹⁰ Relinquished by the prāna, a living being is reduced to a corpse, without value or significance. The *Chhândogya Upanishad*, quoted above, says that a man must not treat roughly his father or mother, or sister or brother or teacher; if he does so he is condemned by all. But after the prāna has left them, their bodies, now corpses, may be struck even with a spear, as is done to a burning body on a funeral pyre.

Several Upanishads describe the rivalry of the organs to determine which one is supreme. Once, for example, the vital organs came to Prajāpati to learn which of them was essential to a living being. Prajāpati said: "He on account of whose departure the body seems worse than the worst—he is the best among you." The tongue (speech) departed. Having been absent for a year, it came back and asked: "How have you been able to live without me?" The other organs replied: "Like mute people, not speaking, but breathing with the nose, seeing with the eyes, hearing with the ears, and thinking with the mind. Thus we lived." Then, one by one, the eyes, the ears, the mind, departed. But the body continued to live, like one blind, one deaf, or one whose mind, like that of an infant, is not yet formed. But—"the prāna, when on the point of departing, tore up the other senses, as a horse, when he breaks loose, tears up the pegs to which he is tethered. They all came to him and said: 'Sir, be thou our lord. Thou art the best among us. Do not depart from us.'"²¹¹

Prāna is not only the life principle in the individual; it is also a cosmic principle. The Upanishads speak of the identity of the microcosm and the macrocosm: that which is manifest in the universe as a whole, with all its phenomena, finds complete expression in man as well. Thus it is said of a man that his head is heaven, his navel is the interspace, his feet the earth, his eyes the sun, his mind the moon, his mouth Indra and Agni, his ears the heavenly regions, and his prāna the wind. Prāna, on account of its pervasiveness, is identified with vāyu, the wind. Just as in the contest among the organs the prāna was declared to be the chief, so also in the contest among the gods—fire, the sun, the moon, and vāyu, which are the cosmic equivalents of the

²⁰⁹ *Pr. Up.* II. 4.

²¹⁰ *Chh. Up.* VII. 15.

²¹¹ *Chh. Up.* V. i. 6-12.

organs—vāyu came out supreme. For when all the gods became weary, vāyu alone retained its energy. Other deities fade; but not so, vāyu. Regarding vāyu it is declared: "From which the sun rises and in which it sets."²¹² Prāna, as vāyu, is identified with Hiranyagarbha, or Sutrātmā. "Through this Sutra, or Vāyu, this and the next life and all beings are held together."²¹³ The senses, at the time of deep sleep, enter into the prāna, and the deities, at the end of a cycle, into Sutrātmā, or the cosmic prāna.

Thus we find in the Upanishads that one of the most important symbols of Brahman is prāna, the life principle that pervades and sustains the universe and the individual body. "Prāna is verily Brahman"—*prāno vai Brahma*.²¹⁴

MANAS AND ĀKĀŚA

The manas, or mind, is the inner organ. It is the instrument of deliberation. The mind deliberates on the sensations gathered through the outer organs (eyes, ears, nose, skin, and tongue) and determines what is right and what is wrong. Though an untrained mind is a cause of attachment and bondage, a purified mind is the means by which one realizes Brahman. "May He stimulate our understanding!" is the most ancient prayer of the Vedas. The Upanishads have used the mind as a symbol of Brahman. "Let a man meditate on the mind as Brahman."²¹⁵ *Mano vai Brahma*—"The mind is verily Brahman."²¹⁶

Ākāśa, generally translated as sky, space, ether, or heaven, has no real equivalent in English. Swami Vivekananda has described it as an intangible substance which is the finest form of matter, as prāna is the subtlest form of energy. Ākāśa is that all-pervading and all-penetrating substance found everywhere in the universe, of which tangible objects are gross manifestations. It is the first material element to be evolved from Brahman. On account of its omnipresence and all-pervasiveness, ākāśa is often used as a symbol of Brahman. "It is ākāśa from which all these creatures take their rise and into which they again return. Ākāśa is older than these; ākāśa is their ultimate end."²¹⁷ "The Brahman which has been thus described [as immortal, with

²¹² *Br. Up.* I. v. 23.

²¹³ *Br. Up.* III. vii. 2.

²¹⁴ *Br. Up.* IV. i. 3.

²¹⁵ *Chh. Up.* III. xviii. 1.

²¹⁶ *Br. Up.* IV. i. 6.

²¹⁷ *Chh. Up.* I. ix. 1.

three feet in heaven, and as the Gāyatri] is the same as the ākāśa which is around us; and the ākāśa which is around us is the same as the ākāśa which is within us; and the ākāśa which is within us is the same as the ākāśa which is within the heart. That ākāśa which is within the heart is omnipresent and unchanging."²¹⁸ The ākāśa "within the lotus of the heart" is to be meditated upon as Brahman. In the *Chhândogya Upanishad*,²¹⁹ kham (ākāśa) is declared to be identical with Kam (Bliss): "Kam is Brahman; kham is Brahman." Through these mutual qualifications both sensual pleasure and corporeality are denied with respect to Brahman.

THE SUN

Of all phenomenal objects, the sun was regarded with the greatest wonder and admiration by the ancients everywhere. Its rays dispel darkness, and the daytime is generally filled with the various activities by which a civilization is created and developed. Even modern scientists are looking to the cosmic rays, associated with the sun, as a source of matter. The Upanishads describe the sun as a symbol of Brahman. The Gāyatri mantra is directed to the Purusha dwelling in the sun. The natural sunlight is a symbol of spiritual light. Brahman is the real Sun of the universe; and the natural sun is the phenomenal form of Brahman. The Purusha in the sun, whose counterpart is the purusha in the right eye, was worshipped by the Vedic seers. A dying man prays to the sun: "The door of the Truth is covered by a golden disc. Open it, O Nourisher! Remove it so that I who have been worshipping the Truth may behold It. O Nourisher, lone Traveller of the sky! Controller! O Sun, Offspring of Prajāpati! Gather Your rays; withdraw Your light. I would see, through Your grace, that form of Yours which is the fairest. I am indeed He, that Purusha, who dwells there."²²⁰

But the most important symbol of Brahman is Om. It is, as stated before, the symbol of both Nirguna Brahman and Brahman with attributes. Ordinary worshippers cannot disregard symbols. Only the highest man, in the depths of his meditation, sees Truth face to face and gives up symbols. As the times change, so do the symbols. Most of the Vedic symbols are out of date; their places have been taken by other and newer ones.

²¹⁸ *Chh. Up.* III. xii. 7-9.

²¹⁹ *IV. x. 5.*

²²⁰ *Br. Up.* V. xv. 1; compare *Is. Up.* 15-16.

BRAHMAN AND ĀTMAN (PSYCHOLOGY)²²¹

The Vedānta philosophy admits the existence of a multitude of individual souls, jivātmās, and distinguishes these from the Supreme Soul, Paramātmā. The individual soul is attached to a body and is the victim of hunger and thirst, pain and pleasure, good and evil, and the other pairs of opposites. Limited in power and wisdom, it is entangled in the eternal round of samsāra and seeks deliverance from it. Scriptural study, instruction from a teacher, and practice of ethical and spiritual disciplines are all meant for the benefit of bound, individual souls. The Supreme Soul, or Brahman, is omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient. It is eternally free, illumined, and pure.

When a man realizes Brahman, he transcends the scriptures, ethics, and the injunctions of religion; but until that moment the experiences of the embodied individual soul are real to him. As long as he sees good and evil he must cultivate the former and shun the latter. The experience of deep sleep is real to the sleeper, but it ceases to exist when he begins to dream. Dream experiences are real to the dreamer, but become meaningless when he is awake. Likewise, waking experiences are real to the waking person, but become meaningless to him when he attains the Knowledge of Brahman.

Though the individual soul and the Supreme Soul are apparently as different from each other as "a glow-worm from the sun and a mustard-seed from Mt. Everest," yet in reality they are completely identical. Each individual soul is Brahman, the Absolute. Its real nature appears to be limited by the upādhis of the sense-organs, the mind, the prāna, and so forth, all created by ignorance, or avidyā. Under the influence of this cosmic illusion, which is capable of making the impossible possible,

²²¹ The Sanskrit word ātman has been translated in the present book as soul and self. Ātman has been used in the Vedānta philosophy to denote both the individual being and the Supreme Being (though ultimately these are identical, yet their difference is admitted in the relative state); the individual being has been expressed by ātman, soul, and self (with small letter); the Supreme Being, by Ātman, Soul, and Self (with capital letter). The Sanskrit word purusha has been translated as person. This word, too, signifies both the individual being and the Universal Being. We have indicated the difference by the use of small and capital letters. The word means, literally, the one who dwells in the body or who pervades the body, which may be the individual physical body or the universe. According to the Non-dualists, the Purusha, the Supreme Person, is Pure Consciousness, pervading the individual body and the universe; but the Dualists describe It as a Person endowed with a form and attributes.

the attributeless Brahman becomes both Maheśvara, or the Supreme Lord, and the jiva, or individual soul. The former has māyā under His control; the latter is controlled by māyā. The individual soul takes māyā to be real. The Upanishads admit the empirical reality (vyvahārika sattvā) of the jiva and deal with its characteristics, wanderings, and final deliverance. But it must always be remembered that the self is Ātman, one and without a second. "This is your self that is within all."²²²

Ātman, through māyā, has projected material forms from Itself and then entered into them as their living self—*anena jivena ātmanā anupraviśya*.²²³ Thus the Upanishads speak of two souls, as it were, dwelling side by side in a man: the Real Soul and the apparent soul. "Two there are who dwell within the body, in the buddhi, the supreme ākāśa of the heart, enjoying the sure rewards of their own actions. The knowers of Brahman describe them as light and shade. . ."²²⁴ When it is said that the Supreme Soul enjoys rewards, the statement is to be taken in a figurative sense. He does not, in reality, enjoy anything, but looks on indifferently at the activities of the other soul. The contrast between the two is made vivid in the following text: "Two birds, inseparable friends, cling to the same tree. One of them eats the sweet fruit; the other looks on without eating. On the same tree the puruṣa sits, grieving, immersed, bewildered by his own impotence. But when he sees the other, the Lord, contented, and knows His glory, then his grief passes away."²²⁵ The whole fifth chapter of the *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad* is devoted to the contrast between the Supreme Soul and the individual soul. The individual soul is endowed with desire, ego, and mind; it enjoys the fruits of its actions; it is limited and insignificant. But it wins Immortality after ridding itself of its upādhis. Then it is recognized as identical with the infinitely great Supreme Soul. "It is not woman, it is not man, nor is it neuter. Whatever body it takes, with that it is joined. By means of thoughts, touching, seeing, and passions, the jiva assumes successively, in various places, various forms in accordance with his deeds, just as the body grows when food and drink are poured into it. The jiva assumes many shapes, coarse or refined, in accordance with his virtue, and having himself caused his union with

²²² *Br. Up.* III. iv. 1.

²²³ *Chh. Up.* VI. iii. 2.

²²⁴ *Ka. Up.* I. iii. 1.

²²⁵ *Śvet. Up.* IV. 6-7.

them, is seen as different beings, through the qualities of his acts and the qualities of his body."²²⁶

It has already been stated that the Supreme Soul, through māyā, assumes a limited body and becomes finite and individualized. The great mystery is that even while subjected to all the limitations and sufferings of the relative world, It does not in reality lose, even in the slightest degree, Its perfect nature. While the jiva, compelled by the bright and dark fruits of its actions, enters on a good or a bad birth, follows a course upwards or downwards, and roams about overcome by the pairs of opposites, "his immortal Self remains like a drop of water on a lotus leaf."²²⁷ He himself is overcome by the gunas of nature. Then, because he is thus overcome, he becomes bewildered, and because he is bewildered he does not see the Creator, the holy Lord, abiding within himself. Carried along by the waves of the gunas, darkened in his imagination, unstable, fickle, crippled, full of desires, vacillating, sensual, disordered, and a prey to delusion, he fancies: 'This is I,' 'This is mine,' and fetters himself by his own action, as a bird by its nest."²²⁸ Śankarāchārya explains the cause of his bondage as "the result of his works, which have originated from such functions of the mind as will and desire"—*manah-sankalpa-icchā-ādi-nispannakarmanimittena*.

"From Ātman are born prāna, mind, and all the sense-organs."²²⁹ After creating the body, Ātman enters into it as the living soul. "Right to the tips of the fingers," He fills the body and is hidden in it like a knife in its sheath or fire in fuel. "When It does the function of living, It is called the prāna; when It speaks, the organ of speech; when It sees, the eye; when It hears, the ear; and when It thinks, the mind. These are merely Its names according to Its functions."²³⁰

THE SENSE-ORGANS

There are ten indriyas, sense-organs, all subordinate to the mind as the central organ. A sense-organ—the eye, for instance—is not the outer instrument that one sees, nor the optic nerve, but its subtle counterpart, which accompanies the subtle body after death. The sense-organs are different from the prāna; the latter is active even in sleep, when the senses do not function. As the rays of light are gathered

²²⁶ *Śvet. Up.* V. 10-12.

²²⁷ I.e. unattached.

²²⁸ *Mai. Up.* III. 2.

²²⁹ *Mu. Up.* II. i. 3.

²³⁰ *Br. Up.* I. iv. 7.

in the sunset, "so also [on a man's falling asleep] is all this gathered in the manas, the supreme deity. Therefore at that time the man does not hear, see, smell, taste, or touch; he does not speak, grasp, beget, evacuate, or move about. He sleeps—that is what people say."²³¹ The sense-organs are ten: five of perception, five of action. The former comprise the ears, nose, tongue, skin, and eyes; the latter, the hands, feet, tongue, and the organs of evacuation and generation.

The mind is the inner organ, the antahkarana. "Desire, deliberation, doubt, faith, want of faith, patience, impatience, shame, intelligence, and fear—all these are but the mind."²³² The mind is the central organ of the entire conscious life. The impressions carried by the sense-organs are shaped by the mind into ideas; for "we see only with the mind, hear with the mind." Further, the mind changes the ideas into resolutions of the will (sankalpa). "When a man directs his manas to the study of the sacred hymns and sayings, he then *studies* them; when to the accomplishment of works, he then *accomplishes* them; when to the desire for sons and cattle, he then *desires* them; when to the desire for the present and the future worlds, he then *desires* them."²³³

PRĀNA

A variety of meanings is attached to prāna—for instance, breath, life, and the sense-organs. Primarily prāna means that vital force in a living being which is incessantly active in waking and sleep. In sleep the organs of sense enter into the mind and "the fires of the prāna keep watch, as it were, in the city of the body."²³⁴ According to its different functions, the prāna is given five names: prāna, apāna, vyāna, udāna, and samāna. "Now the air which rises upwards is prāna; that which moves downwards is apāna."²³⁵ Vyāna "sweeps like a flame through all the limbs"; it is what sustains life when, for instance, in drawing a stiff bow, a man neither breathes in nor breathes out.²³⁶ Udāna conducts the soul from the body at death.²³⁷ By virtue of samāna, food is assimilated.²³⁸

According to the later Vedāntists the five organs of action, the five

²³¹ *Pr. Up.* IV. 2.

²³² *Br. Up.* I. v. 3.

²³³ *Chh. Up.* VII. iii. 1.

²³⁴ *Pr. Up.* IV. 3.

²³⁵ *Mai. Up.* II. 6.

²³⁶ See *Chh. Up.* I. iii. 5.

²³⁷ See *Pr. Up.* III. 7.

²³⁸ See *Mai. Up.* II. 6.

organs of perception, the five prānas, the manas, and the buddhi constitute the "subtle body," which accompanies the soul at the time of rebirth. The gross body is dissolved at death; the subtle body departs with the organs. The relation between the subtle body and the gross body is like that between seed and plant. According to some Vedāntists another entity, called the "shelter of karma" (karma-āśraya), which determines the character of the new body and life, accompanies the subtle body. This entity is formed of impressions created by the actions performed in the course of life. "As it (the jiva) does and acts, so it becomes; by doing good it becomes good and by doing evil it becomes evil—it becomes virtuous through good acts and vicious through evil acts."²³⁹

THE GROSS PHYSICAL BODY

Vedāntists analyse the material body into five kośas, or sheaths, namely, the gross physical sheath (annamayakośa), the sheath of the prāna (prānamayakośa), the sheath of the mind (manomayakośa), the sheath of the buddhi or intellect (vijñānamayakośa), and the sheath of bliss (ānandamayakośa). They are called sheaths because they conceal Ātman, as a sheath conceals a sword. They are described as being one inside another—the physical sheath being the outermost and the sheath of bliss the innermost. Each succeeding sheath is finer than the preceding one. As a fine substance permeates a gross one, so the finer sheath permeates the grosser sheath. Ātman is detached from the sheaths. Its light and consciousness permeate them all, though in varying degrees according to their density. By cultivating detachment toward these sheaths, one by one, and gradually penetrating deeper, a man realizes Ātman as Pure Consciousness.²⁴⁰

The body is often described as the city of Brahman.²⁴¹ The gates of the body are sometimes described as eleven,²⁴² and sometimes as nine.²⁴³ The nine gates consist of the eyes, the ears, the nostrils, the mouth, and the organs of evacuation and generation. Two additional gates are the navel and the aperture at the top of the head (Brahmarandhra). Without the soul, the body is absolutely valueless—a mere corpse. "This ill-

²³⁹ *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 5.

²⁴⁰ For a detailed description of the sheaths, see *Self-Knowledge*, by Swami Nikhilananda, p. 81 ff.

²⁴¹ See *Br. Up.* II. v. 18.

²⁴² *Kā. Up.* II. ii. 1.

²⁴³ *Śvet. Up.* III. 18.

smelling, unsubstantial body: a mere mass of bones, skin, sinews, marrow, flesh, seed, blood, mucus, tears, eye-gum, ordure, urine, gall, and phlegm. What is the use of enjoying pleasures in this body, which is assailed by lust, hatred, greed, delusion, fear, anguish, jealousy, separation from what is loved, union with what is not loved, hunger, thirst, old age, death, illness, grief, and other evils?"²⁴⁴

The heart has received much attention from the seers of the Upanishads. It is the resting-place of the *prānas*, the senses, and the mind. It is the abode of Brahman. "That great birthless Self, which is identified with the intellect and is in the midst of the organs, lies in the *ākāśa* that is within the heart. It is the controller of all, the lord of all, the ruler of all."²⁴⁵ Its physical shape is often compared to a lotus bud. The aspirant is asked to meditate on Brahman dwelling in the heart.

THE STATES OF THE SOUL

The Upanishads discuss at great length the three states of the soul (*avasthātraya*). They are the waking state, the dream state, and dreamless sleep. These cover the totality of the soul's experiences in the relative world. As we analyse the three states, *Ātman's* metaphysical nature becomes more and more plainly visible. But in its true nature—as *Turiya*, or the Fourth—*Ātman* is the detached "Witness of the three states." During the state of deep sleep the soul enjoys a temporary union with Brahman and frees itself from fear and suffering. But, as *Turiya*, it experiences consciously and always the undying Bliss of Brahman.

WAKING

Ātman, during the waking state—when It is known by the technical name of *Viśva* or *Vaiśvānara*—experiences the physical world in common with all men. It uses the various sense-organs as Its instruments. But there is no real difference between waking and dreaming. In both states a false reality is contemplated; one's real Self remains unknown. Waking, like dreaming, is *māyā*, as *Gauḍapāda* states, since it projects for us a manifold universe. The perceptions of waking, just like those of dreams, have their origin solely within man himself and have no other existence except in the mind of him who is awake. And further, as the reality of the dreamer is discarded on awakening, so too the

²⁴⁴ *Mat. Up.* I. 3.

²⁴⁵ *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 22.

so-called reality of waking is discarded when we dream. Just as a fish swims between the two banks of a river without touching them, so *Ātman* roams between the states of waking and dreaming;²⁴⁶ from waking It hastens to dreaming, and from this again "back to the waking state. He is untouched by whatever he sees in that state, for this Infinite Being is unattached."²⁴⁷

DREAMING

The dream world is a private world of the dreamer—from the waking standpoint, of course. The soul, while dreaming, is known by the technical name of *Taijasa*. The experiences of a dream are as real as waking experiences, so long as the dream lasts. On awaking from a dream, a man discovers that his body and senses were inactive and thus concludes that he was dreaming. "When he dreams, he takes away a little of [the impressions of] this all-embracing world (the waking state), himself puts the body aside, and creates [a dream body in its place], revealing his own lustre by his own light—and dreams. In this state the man himself becomes the light. There are no chariots, no animals to be yoked to them, no roads there, but he creates the chariots, animals, and roads. There are no pleasures, joys, or delights there, but he creates the pleasures, joys, and delights. There are no pools, tanks, or rivers there, but he creates the pools, tanks, and rivers; for he is the creator."²⁴⁸ "In the dream world the Shining One, attaining higher and lower states, puts forth innumerable forms. He seems to be enjoying himself in the company of women, or laughing, or even seeing frightful things."²⁴⁹ The subject and the object in the dream, and their relationship, are all created by *Ātman* from the mind-stuff and illumined by Its own effulgence. This is evidence that *Ātman* is the inner light of man.

DREAMLESS SLEEP

The dreamer passes into profound sleep, in which state *Ātman* is known by the technical name of *Prājña*. "When a man, being thus asleep, sees no dream whatever, he becomes one with *Prāna* alone; then speech enters therein with all names, the eye with all forms, the ear

²⁴⁶ See *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 18.

²⁴⁷ *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 18.

²⁴⁸ *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 9-10.

²⁴⁹ *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 13.

with all sounds, the mind with all thoughts."²⁵⁰ In deep sleep the soul is united with the Consciousness that is Brahman (Prājñena Ātmanā).²⁵¹ There are no longer any contrasted objects; there is no consciousness in the empirical sense. There is a union with the eternal Knowing Subject, that is to say, with Brahman. But this union is only apparent and is unlike the true union that follows the Knowledge of Brahman. The sleeper returns to consciousness of the waking world and becomes again his old self. In dreamless sleep Ātman remains covered by the thin layer of the veiling-power of māyā; that is why, unlike Turiya, It is unconscious of the world. Like two extremes, which sometimes meet, the state of deep sleep in many respects resembles perfect Knowledge. It is a state where a man is fearless, beyond desires, and free from evils. Like a man in perfect communion with Brahman, he does not know anything at all of the world within or without. "In this state a father is no father, a mother no mother, the worlds are no worlds, the Vedas no Vedas. In this state a thief is no thief, the killer of a noble brāhmin is no killer . . . [this form of his] is untouched by good works and untouched by evil works; for he is beyond all the woes of his heart (intellect)."²⁵² In the state of deep sleep the soul does not really become unconscious. The Consciousness belonging to Ātman is not destroyed, because this Consciousness is immortal. It appears, therefore, that in the relative world the nearest approach to the peace and desirelessness of Brahman is the experience of deep sleep.

TURIYA

Ātman in Its purest form, detached from the three states and subsisting alone and by Itself, is called Turiya, which is the same as Nirguna Brahman. That Turiya is different from the state of deep sleep has been emphasized by Gaudapāda. "Prājña (the Self associated with deep sleep) does not know anything of the Self or the non-Self, neither truth nor untruth. But Turiya is ever existent and ever all-seeing. Non-cognition of duality is common to both Prājña and Turiya. But Prājña is associated with sleep, in which relative experiences remain in seed form; there is no sleep in Turiya."²⁵³ "To dream is to cognize Reality in a wrong manner. [Even an awakened man, under the spell

²⁵⁰ *Kau. Up.* III. 8.

²⁵¹ *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 21.

²⁵² *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 22.

²⁵³ *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā.* I. 12-13.

of ignorance, acts as if he were dreaming.] Deep sleep is the state in which one does not know at all what Reality is. When the erroneous knowledge associated with dreaming and deep sleep disappears, one realizes Turiya. When the jīva, asleep under the influence of the beginningless māyā, is awakened, it then realizes [within itself] Non-duality, eternal and dreamless."²⁵⁴ Turiya is free from the notion of the empirical subject and object. It pervades all the phenomena of the relative universe, as the desert pervades a mirage. It is the unrelated foundation of the three states and is realized by the illumined soul always and in everything, once ignorance is dispelled by the Vedāntic discipline.

WHAT BECOMES OF A MAN AFTER DEATH

The question regarding a man's hereafter was perhaps raised even at the dawn of human thinking. Vedic philosophy has dealt with the subject, and the conclusion arrived at is very significant. The doctrine of karma and the rebirth of the soul has exercised a profound practical influence upon millions of Hindus from the most ancient times. Even now its influence on their daily lives is great. All the good and evil that befall a man during one lifetime cannot be explained if we confine our attention to this life alone. What does he know of life who only one life knows? In the narrow span of a single life we cannot possibly reap the fruit of all that we do. It is reasonable to admit the existence of a transmigrating soul in order to substantiate the general belief in moral requital. "A mortal ripens like corn, and like corn he springs up again."²⁵⁵ But the seed is left. We are all born with a blue-print of our life, as it were, mainly prepared by our actions in the previous life. Our present acts and thoughts are the result of our past and create our future. Man is the architect of his own fate and the builder of his own future destiny. This conviction makes the believer in the doctrine of rebirth responsible for his present suffering and also gives him an incentive for habitual right conduct to build up a happy future. As he accepts with serenity his present good or ill fortune, he can also look forward to the future with joy and courage. If present suffering is the result of a past wicked action, then, in order to avoid suffering in a future existence, a thoughtful man should desire to sin no more.

It is claimed by yogins that through proper spiritual disciplines one

²⁵⁴ *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā.* I. 15-16.

²⁵⁵ *Ka. Up.* I. i. 6.

can learn about one's past lives. Buddhist thinkers also share this view. But what happens after death is, to the rational mind, a mere matter of conjecture. The experiences of the hereafter cannot be demonstrated in public. Time, space, and other conditions would certainly be different on the two sides of the grave. Therefore a living man would not understand the accounts of the dead even if they were to return to earth to tell him of their experiences. For this reason a scientific mind can only accept a plausible theory regarding after-death experiences. The theory of total annihilation is not satisfactory. It gives only a partial picture of existence. This theory is not only inconsistent with the self-love we all possess, but also with the intuitive and direct experience of the seers regarding the indestructibility of the Soul and Its freedom from birth and dissolution. The rishis of the Upanishads were not impressed by the theory of eternal retribution in heaven or hell. That theory reveals a total disproportion between cause and effect. Life on earth is short, exposed to error, and bristling with temptations. Many of our wrong actions are the result of faulty upbringing and environment. To inflict upon the soul eternal punishment for the errors of a few years, or even of a whole lifetime, is to throw to the winds all sense of proportion. It is also inconsistent with God's love for His created beings.

The Hindus have therefore developed the doctrine of rebirth. According to this view, it is the desire for material objects that is responsible for a person's embodiment. Desires are of many kinds: some can be fulfilled in a human body, some in a subhuman body, and others in a superhuman body. When a man has fulfilled every desire through repeated births, without deriving abiding satisfaction, and finds the relative world to be bound by the law of cause and effect, he longs for communion with Brahman, which alone is untouched by the causal law. In most cases—barring those souls who attain Liberation from Brahmaloċa—a human body is the best instrument for the attainment of Knowledge and Freedom; for in a god's body or in a sub-human body one experiences only the fruits of one's past action. Neither a god nor an animal reaps the fruits of action. Therefore they cannot be liberated unless they are born again in a human body.

According to the theory of rebirth, a soul is born again and again, high or low, depending on the merit or demerit of his actions, so that in every birth he may acquire a little more understanding and detachment and in the end attain perfect Knowledge and Freedom. This theory is in conformity with the law of cause and effect, which is the

very basis of the physical universe. It is also in agreement with the spiritual experiences of the mystics regarding man's ultimate end, which is the attainment of the knowledge of the Soul's Immortality. Rebirth is the inevitable corollary of the Soul's indestructibility and explains the *raison d'être* of its embodiment in the relative universe.

It must not be forgotten, however, that the doctrine of rebirth belongs to the *aparā vidyā*, the lower knowledge, and operates in the universe of *māyā*. The *Parā Vidyā*, or Higher Knowledge, removes the illusion of the manifold world and, with it, of the individual soul and its birth, death, and hereafter.

There are many strands of thoughts in the Vedas and the Upanishads concerning the soul's hereafter. Vāmadeva, an illumined seer of the Rig-Veda said: "I was Manu, and the sun."²⁵⁶ The gods, who enjoy a relative immortality, are those fortunate souls who, as a result of their meritorious actions on earth, are elevated to exalted positions after death. Men seeking heavenly felicity often worship the gods.

The kingdom of inexhaustible light
Whence is derived the radiance of the sun—
To this kingdom transport me,
Eternal, undying.

Where is longing and the consummation of longing,
Where the other side of the sun is seen,
Where is refreshment and satiety—
There suffer me to dwell immortal.

Where bliss resides, and felicity,
Where joy beyond joy dwells,
Where the craving of desire is stilled—
There suffer me to dwell immortal.²⁵⁷

"O Fire, lead us by the good path for the enjoyment of the fruit of our action. You know, O god, all our deeds."²⁵⁸ The ignorant are sent to a region of "blind darkness,"²⁵⁹ but not to hell. Since each soul is a

²⁵⁶ *Br. Up.* I. iv. 10.

²⁵⁷ *Ri. IX.* cxiii. 7, 10, 11 (from the translation by Deussen).

²⁵⁸ *Is. Up.* 18.

²⁵⁹ *Is. Up.* 3.

"portion of the Divine," none can ever be utterly destroyed or deprived altogether of his spiritual heritage. There are passages in the Vedas indicating retribution, which consists in having dealt out to us in the next life the very same good and evil which we have dealt out to others in this. Each man is born into a world that has been fashioned by himself. Discerning souls, who have realized the transitory nature of life on earth or in the heavenly worlds, want to avoid a "renewed death" (punarmrityu) and therefore aspire to Brahmaloaka, the Highest Heaven, from which one does not return to earth.²⁶⁰

The teachings of the *Katha Upanishad* begin with a direct question regarding the soul's hereafter. "There is this doubt about a man when he is dead: Some say that he exists; others, that he does not. This I should like to know, taught by you." The teacher, the god of death, first gives, in reply, a striking discourse on the Soul's indestructibility. Then he states the doctrine of rebirth. "Some jivas enter the womb to be embodied as organic beings, and some go into non-organic matter—according to their work and according to their knowledge."²⁶¹

The *Bhagavad Gitā* describes death as one of a series of changes: "Even as the embodied Self passes, in this body, through the stages of childhood, youth, and old age, so does It pass into another body. Calm souls are not bewildered by this."²⁶² Rebirth is directly referred to in the following verse: "Even as a person casts off worn-out clothes and puts on others that are new, so the embodied Self casts off worn-out bodies and enters into others that are new."²⁶³

The doctrine of rebirth was considered by Yājñavalkya to be a profound mystery. No fruitful purpose could be served by discussing it in a public assembly of pundits. "Yājñavalkya," so Ārthabhāga spoke, 'when the vocal organ of a man who dies is merged in fire, the nose in the air, the eye in the sun, the mind in the moon, the ear in the quarters, the body in the earth, the ākāśa of the heart in the external ākāśa, the hair on the body in the herbs, that on the head in the trees, and the blood and semen in water, where then is the man?' Yājñavalkya answered: 'Give me your hand, dear Ārthabhāga. We shall decide this matter between ourselves; we cannot do it in a crowd.' They went out and talked it over. What they mentioned there was work, and what

²⁶⁰ See p. 69.

²⁶¹ *Ka. Up.* II. ii. 7.

²⁶² *B. G.* II. 13.

²⁶³ *B. G.* II. 22.

they praised there was also work. Therefore one becomes good through good work and evil through evil work."²⁶⁴

For a more vivid description of rebirth: "When the soul departs, the prāna follows; when the prāna departs, all the organs follow. Then the soul has particular consciousness and goes to the body which is related to that consciousness. It is followed by knowledge, works, and past experience. Just as a leech supported on a straw goes to the end of it, takes hold of another support, and contracts itself, so does the self throw this body aside—make it senseless—take hold of another support, and contract itself. Just as a goldsmith takes a little quantity of gold and fashions another—a newer and better—form, so does the soul throw this body away, or make it senseless, and make another—a newer and better—form, suited to the manes, or the celestial minstrels, or the gods, or Virāt, or Hiranyagarbha, or other beings. . . . As it does and acts, so it becomes; by doing good it becomes good, and by doing evil it becomes evil—it becomes virtuous through good acts and vicious through evil acts. Others, however, say: 'The self is identified with desire alone. What it desires, it resolves; what it resolves, it works out; what it works out, it attains.'²⁶⁵

The *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*²⁶⁶ describes the "doctrine of the Five Fires" in connexion with rebirth. This doctrine, which was a secret with the kshattriyas, was taught by Pravāhana, the king of the Panchālas, to the brāhmin Āruni, as we have seen. According to this teaching, as the body is cremated, the soul ascends heavenward through the flame and smoke and goes to the Plane of the Moon, whence it falls to earth in the form of rain. With the rain it is absorbed by plants that bear cereal; with the food it is eaten by man and is transformed into semen, and, entering a woman's womb, is born as a human being. Thus people are born again and again on earth and lead their merry-go-round existence. But those wretched souls who do not follow either of the two ways—the Way of the Gods (Devayāna) or the Way of the Fathers (Pitriyāna)²⁶⁷—become insects: moths or biting creatures like gnats and mosquitoes.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁴ *Br. Up.* III. ii. 13.

²⁶⁵ *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 2-5.

²⁶⁶ VI. ii. 2-14.

²⁶⁷ See p. 70.

²⁶⁸ See *Br. Up.* VI. ii. 16.

LIBERATION (MOKSHA)

The Plane of the Moon and the worlds of the insignificant creatures fall to the lot of those who are attached to material things, cling to individual life, cherish desires, and seek the results of action. Those who seek release from death and practise spiritual discipline, on the other hand, gain Brahmaloċa, where one experiences immortality in a relative sense. But the reflective man, in whom the higher faculties of the mind are awakened, longs for release from phenomenal existence itself, with all its fetters and bonds that keep the senses tied to the world.

The assurance of rebirth may bring happiness to those who are afraid of annihilation after death or of the boredom of heaven; but life on earth in any form cannot escape old age, disease, and death. The law of karma is inexorable here and in heaven, or, as a matter of fact, anywhere in time and space. The individual soul is bound by this chain of cause and effect. The seeker after Liberation, therefore, resolves upon "cutting the knot" by turning away from the entire phenomenal existence of time, space, and causality. True, the destruction of individuality and the suppression of the natural cravings are regarded by many as the severest punishment; but these are the supreme reward for the spiritual endeavour of those who aspire to true Immortality.

What impelled the rishis of the Upanishads to regard the whole of phenomenal existence as evil and the absorption of individuality in Brahman as the Highest Good? It was not their desire to escape the sufferings of existence, well known to all; it was not their unwillingness to face the problems of life. Nor was it the result of frustration, which, it is often stated, was experienced by the majority of the Hindus because they were always exploited by a handful of brāhmin priests and kshatriya rulers. Life on the banks of the Ganges and the Indus was happy, affluent, and colourful. It was filled with the joy of adventure, as evidenced by the many-sided development of Hindu society at that time. Moreover, the longing for Liberation was not cultivated by the downtrodden masses, but by reflective minds belonging to the upper castes. The brāhmin boy Nachiketā spurned all the happiness of earth and heaven in order to attain Liberation. Maitreyī refused to accept from her brāhmin husband her share of wealth, which makes a worldly person happy, because she wanted to know the secret of Immortality. The desire for Liberation, as we shall presently see,

was not the result of any extraneous conditions; it was the necessary consequence of the doctrine of Brahman and Ātman developed in the Upanishads.

One studying this Upanishadic doctrine, unique and original in the entire range of human thought, cannot but admire the daring of the Hindu mind in the field of metaphysical speculation. And as one witnesses men and women, in all stages of life, ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of Immortality and Freedom, one cannot but be impressed by their tremendous will power. The complete renunciation of everything one holds near and dear in the mortal world—including inordinate attachment to one's own body, ego, and individual self—is the *sine qua non* of the realization of Freedom. And yet the Vedas and the books of the Hindu dharma ask a Hindu to cultivate a warm love of life. One must enjoy, on earth, one hundred years—the life-span allotted to man by God. Marriage is compulsory for Hindu men and women, except in a few specified cases. One without progeny goes, after death, to the abode of suffering. Without money no all-round happiness can be enjoyed. One must heighten the power of the senses so that, through enjoyment of material pleasures, one may relieve the drab grey of everyday existence. The first period of life should be devoted to the acquisition of learning, the second, to the enjoyment of material pleasures, and the third, to the contemplation of the gods, so that after death one may attain untold happiness in heaven. "Through wealth one conquers this world, through progeny, the World of the Fathers, and through sacrificial offerings, the World of the Gods." All of this is minutely described in the Vedas, which, to a Hindu, are the source of spiritual wisdom. He must not only study the Vedas but actually perform the sacrifices that they enjoin.

And yet the three worlds—earth, heaven, and the interspace—will one day disappear. Brahmā, the Creator God, with all the dwellers in the Highest Heaven, will also perish. The Vedic sacrifices bring rewards that are contaminated by māyā and the three gunas. The inquirer after Immortality must transcend the Vedas. He is required to cut at the very foundation of the attachment that supports the phenomenal existence here and hereafter. He must relinquish the longing for wealth, progeny, and the heavenly world. These make one forgetful of Ātman. The forgetfulness of one's true Self is the greatest suffering for a man. Everything that is not Ātman is trivial (alpam). There is no real happiness in the trivial; the only happiness is in the Infinite (Bhumā).

Why, then, did the Vedas lay down injunctions for a religious life and the propitiation of the gods through sacrifices? The earthbound soul must learn through actual experience the futility of attachment to material things. It must pass through the whole gamut of empirical existence, from that of the "blade of grass" to the noble life of Brahman. Only then will it cultivate dispassion for *māyā* and its effects. Those alone who have renounced all longing for the pleasures found on earth, and also for the felicity in heaven described in the Vedas, can cultivate *vairāgyam*, dispassion, and become entitled to the Knowledge of Ātman. Every soul, it is true, after going through all the worldly experiences, will in course of time attain Liberation; but the Vedic scheme of life shortens the period of our sojourn in the relative world.

It is quite natural for people to regard that as the highest aim of personal endeavour which they consider to be the basis of the universe and the First Principle of things. Those who regard the deities in that light seek union with them after death. Thus they worship various gods in order to obtain fellowship and companionship with them in heaven. Again, those who consider Brahman to be the origin and end of things naturally want union with It. Brahman, Pure Consciousness, is the same as Ātman. Therefore the attainment of Ātman becomes the supreme goal of life. That is why the realization of Ātman has been stressed in the Vedas. "Only he who knows the Purusha escapes from the realm of death; by no other road is it possible to go."²⁶⁹ "The Self is his pathfinder; he who finds Him is no longer stained by action, that evil thing."²⁷⁰ "He is my Soul; thither to this Soul, on my departure hence, shall I go."²⁷¹

The nature of Brahman, or Ātman, is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. It dwells in every heart. On account of *māyā* a man is not conscious of his true Self. So the only way to Liberation is that of the Knowledge of the Self. Ethical laws, sacrificial ceremonies, philanthropic works, austerities, study of scripture, worship, and other similar spiritual disciplines only serve to remove the impurities of the mind, which hinder the manifestation of Ātman. Ātman is to be known now and here, and not elsewhere after death. "If a man knows Ātman here, he then attains the true goal of life. If he does not know It here, a great destruction awaits him."²⁷² Therefore the Upanishads lay down, again and again,

²⁶⁹ *Vāj. Sam.* XXXI. 18.

²⁷⁰ *Tai. Br.* III. xii. 9. 8.

²⁷¹ *Śa. Br.* X. vi. 3.

²⁷² *Ke. Up.* II. 5.

Self-Knowledge as the condition for Self-realization. And the Vedic seers admonish us to ask for this Knowledge in our daily prayers.

Moksha, or Liberation, is not the result of Knowledge. It is not a new acquisition. Causation applies to the realm of becoming and not to Brahman, which is Pure Being and beyond all categories. Causation rules the finite world of the manifold. It is inconceivable in Ātman, which is one and without a second. If Moksha were the result of Knowledge and were therefore endowed with a beginning, it would then come to an end. It would not be eternal. Arising from non-existence, it would again dissolve into nothingness. "Moksha (Liberation) cannot have a beginning and be eternal."²⁷³ Liberation is therefore not something which is created, but is the realization of That which has existed from eternity but has hitherto been concealed from us. "All *jivas* are ever free from bondage and pure by nature. They are ever illumined and liberated from the very beginning."²⁷⁴ As people who do not know the location of hidden gold fail to find it though walking over it again and again, so likewise, "all these creatures, day after day, go into the world of Brahman, being merged in Brahman while asleep, and yet do not discover It because they are carried away by untruth."²⁷⁵ He who knows the Self is liberated; even the gods cannot prevent his being so, because he has realized himself to be the very Soul (Ātman) of the gods.²⁷⁶ "He who knows the Supreme Brahman verily becomes Brahman."²⁷⁷ He has attained the true Immortality, that is to say, indestructibility without a continued existence, and not the state of non-dying-ness in heaven. Thus, according to the Upanishads, Liberation is not the result of the Knowledge of Ātman; it is that Knowledge. It is not affected by the Knowledge of Ātman; but this Knowledge is itself Liberation in its fullness. Desire is death; desirelessness is Liberation. He who has realized himself as Brahman, infinite and all-pervading, he who sees the whole universe in himself and himself in the universe, cannot desire anything. "What can he crave who has attained all desires?"²⁷⁸ "The fetters of the heart are broken, all doubts are resolved, and all works cease to bear fruit."²⁷⁹

²⁷³ *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā.* IV. 30.

²⁷⁴ *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā.* IV. 98.

²⁷⁵ *Chh. Up.* VIII. iii. 2.

²⁷⁶ See *Br. Up.* I. iv. 10.

²⁷⁷ *Mu. Up.* III. ii. 9.

²⁷⁸ *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā.* I. 9.

²⁷⁹ *Mu. Up.* II. ii. 8.

What happens to a knower of the Self after death? What path does he follow?—What path could he follow? He finds himself everywhere in the whole universe. "The east is the eastern prāna; the south, the southern prāna; the west, the western prāna; the north, the northern prāna; the direction above, the upper prāna; the direction below, the nether prāna; and all the quarters, the different prānas."²⁸⁰ Whither will the soul of the knower of Ātman go? It does not go to any place where it has not been from the very beginning, nor does it become anything other than what it has always been—that is to say, Brahman, Pure Consciousness.

Unilluminated souls go to heaven or return to earth for the satisfaction of their unfulfilled desires. He who desires is reborn. "But the man who does not desire is not reborn. Of him who is without desires, who is free from desires, the objects of whose desire have been attained, and to whom all objects of desire are but the Self—the prānas do not depart. Being but Brahman, he is merged in Brahman. Regarding this there is this verse: 'When all the desires that dwell in his heart are gone, then he, having been mortal, becomes immortal and attains Brahman in this very body.' Just as the lifeless slough of a snake is cast off and lies on an ant-hill, so does his body lie. Then the self becomes disembodied and immortal; it becomes the Supreme Brahman, the Light."²⁸¹

The knower of Ātman is like a man who is awakened from sleep and dreams no more of empty things. He is like a man who, having been sick, is now whole again; he is like a man who, having been blind, has received back his eyesight.

The Knowledge of the Self liberates a man from desire, fear, and death.

"He who sees this does not see death or illness or pain; he who sees this sees everything and obtains everything everywhere."²⁸²

"He who knows the Bliss of that Brahman, from whence all speech, with the mind, turns away, unable to reach It, fears nothing."²⁸³

"There is one Supreme Ruler, the inmost Self of all beings, who makes His one form manifold. Eternal happiness belongs to the wise who perceive Him within themselves—not to others."²⁸⁴

²⁸⁰ *Br. Up.* IV. ii. 4.

²⁸¹ *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 6-7.

²⁸² *Chh. Up.* VII. xxvi. 2.

²⁸³ *Tat. Up.* II. 9.

²⁸⁴ *Ka. Up.* II. ii. 12.

"When all the desires that dwell in the heart fall away, then the mortal becomes immortal and here attains Brahman. When all the ties of the heart are severed here on earth, then the mortal becomes immortal—this much alone is the teaching."²⁸⁵

"When the Light has risen, there is no day, no night, neither existence nor non-existence; the Blessed One alone is there. That is the eternal, the adorable light of the Sun—and the ancient wisdom proceeded thence."²⁸⁶

"As flowing rivers disappear in the sea, losing their names and forms, so a wise man, freed from name and form, attains the Purusha, who is greater than the great."²⁸⁷

How does a jivanmukta, a liberated soul, act? How does he move? How does he live? Ordinary minds cannot understand his actions, life, or movements, any more than a dreaming man can see the world of the awakened. The rishis of the Upanishads declare that a jivanmukta is free from desires (akāmayamāna). "The ancient sages, it is said, did not desire children, thinking: What shall we achieve through children—we who have attained this Self, this world? They renounced, it is said, their desire for sons, for wealth, and for the worlds, and lived a mendicant life."²⁸⁸

A jivanmukta is no longer vexed by fear: "For what was there to fear? It is from a second entity that fear comes."²⁸⁹ As he himself is without fear, he does not become a cause of fear to anyone; he regards all beings as projections of himself.

A jivanmukta is free from the illusion of individuality and therefore from the possibility of pain. "He who knows Ātman overcomes grief."²⁹⁰ "When in the body [thinking this body is I, and I am the body], the Self is held by pleasure and pain; but when He is free from the body [when He knows Himself to be different from the body], neither pleasure nor pain touches Him."²⁹¹

A jivanmukta is free from the binding effects of past action. "All works cease to bear fruit."²⁹² It is consciousness of individuality that

²⁸⁵ *Ka. Up.* II. iii. 14-15.

²⁸⁶ *Śvet. Up.* IV. 18.

²⁸⁷ *Mu. Up.* III. ii. 8.

²⁸⁸ *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 22.

²⁸⁹ *Br. Up.* I. iv. 2.

²⁹⁰ *Chh. Up.* VII. i. 3.

²⁹¹ *Chh. Up.* VIII. xii. 1.

²⁹² *Mu. Up.* II. ii. 8.

impels a man to selfish action, whose good or bad result he must reap at a future date. But the liberated man has realized his individuality as a part of the cosmic illusion and, with the attainment of Knowledge, freed himself from its spell. The awakened person does not reap the fruit of his dream actions.

A liberated man is not given to inactivity, which is a characteristic of *tamas*. He sees action in non-action and non-action in action. Actions do not cling to him. Even while performing actions through his body and senses, he knows his inner Self to be actionless and detached. He knows that the Self is not the doer, but the Witness; It is not the actor, but the Spectator. He can never perform an evil action. All his evil instincts were destroyed when he practised spiritual discipline. Only good comes out of him—and that, too, without any effort. "This is the eternal glory of a knower of Brahman: it never increases or decreases by work. [Therefore] one should know the nature of that alone. Knowing it one is not touched by evil action. Therefore he who knows it as such becomes self-controlled, calm, withdrawn into himself, enduring, and concentrated, and sees the Self in his own body; he sees all as the Self. Evil does not overtake him, but he transcends all evil. Evil does not trouble him, [but] he consumes all evil. He becomes sinless, taintless, free from doubts, and a knower of Brahman."²⁹³

A liberated soul has attained the blessed state of being free from doubt. "All doubts are resolved."²⁹⁴ His knowledge of *Ātman* is not based upon intellect but is the result of direct experience. And the illusion, once destroyed, does not come back.

A *jivanmukta* is no longer concerned about bondage or Liberation; for these really do not belong to *Ātman*, the Self ever free. Bondage and Liberation are characteristics of the mind. On account of *māyā* an ignorant person thinks of himself as bound and then strives for Liberation; but *Ātman* is always free. In the inspiring words of *Gauḍapāda*: "There is neither death nor birth, neither a struggling nor a bound soul, neither a seeker after Liberation nor a liberated one—this, indeed, is the ultimate truth."

²⁹³ *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 23.

²⁹⁴ *Mu. Up.* II. ii. 8.

KATHA UPANISHAD